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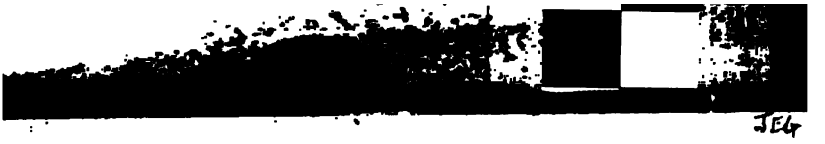
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FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN

JOSEPH HOCKING



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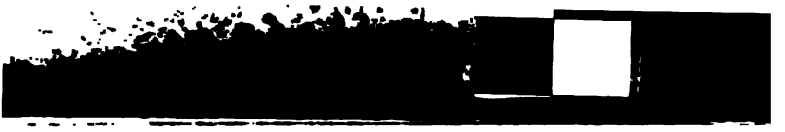


" 'Do you wonder that I hate my wife now?' "

Fields of Fair Renown.] [*Page 357.*







FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN.

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING.



"'Accepted'"
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FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

AUTHOR OF "ALL MEN ARE LIARS," "ISHMAEL PENGELLY,"
"THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE AND VIGNETTE BY
J. BARNARD DAVIS

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FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN

CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGE GENIUS

MERLIN ROSEVEAR was walking along a Cornish lane on a June evening. As usual he was dreaming, for Merlin was a great dreamer. Nearly all the other young men who lived in the village near, or were connected with the Besowsa mine, had either gone to see their sweethearts or were gathered together in groups in order to talk of matters in which they were interested. But Merlin had been known all his life as a "loanly booy." He preferred the companionships of the people of his imagination to those of the village; he would rather dream of the future he hoped for, than listen to the talk of the lads with whom he had gone to school.

The general opinion in Besowsa mine was that Merlin would never make out much in life. People admitted that he was clever, and that he had "nearly as much larnin' as the passon hisself," but then he wasn't practical.

When he had left school he went to work with his father underground, and while he gained a thorough knowledge of mining, he was never contented as a miner. He generally

carried a book in his pocket, and was far more interested in the history of the strange people who ages before came to Cornwall to dig for tin, than in the welfare of Besowsa Tin Mining Company, Limited.

A year before this story opens he had been appointed as mine clerk, and while his work was more congenial than that of the men who worked underground, he was far from happy.

The truth was Merlin wanted to be a man of letters. From the days of his childhood he had revelled in the stories for which Cornwall is so famous. He had delighted himself in listening to old cronies' stories of wizards, fairies, and witchcraft, and in after years he longed to give to the world books which should tell out his dreams of life. He would rather have seen his name on the title-page of a successful book than to be a peer of the realm or the Prime Minister of the country.

Some of the dreams of his life, too, were very beautiful. He lived in the world of romance; and true, pure romance is ever beautiful. He had visions far removed from the sordid materialism which he saw around him. He saw Utopian heights which to him were possible, and these he wanted to write about.

He was a great reader, as the reading of country youths go. He revelled in the fine writing of Isaiah and that in the Book of Job, and could repeat from memory many a passage from Milton and Shakespeare. Neither was he altogether ignorant of later literature. He knew Walter Scott and Charles Dickens. He knew a little of Browning, and more of Tennyson.

As I said, Merlin Rosevear was walking along a Cornish lane on a summer evening, and as he walked he saw visions of what he wanted to do and be.

"Yes," he mused, "I'll do it. I've stories to tell as well

as the best of them. I'm full of fancies, full of hopes. I'm sure my work is far better than half of that which is accepted. Oh, if those editors would only give me a chance!"

He strode on, his lips moving nervously.

"I've no one to encourage me; no one understands me," he continued, bitterly. "People laugh at my ideas. Even the new travelling preacher tells me that my thoughts are too unpractical to be worth anything, while father is always laughing at me. But I'll do it; I'll do it," and his eyes sparkled at the thought of victory.

"No man can be happy unless his surroundings are agreeable," he went on. "Everything frets and irritates him otherwise. Besides, why should I do work that I hate when there is a possibility of spending my whole time in doing what I love? Some people call me lazy because I will not do as they do, but they shall know some day! Why do I have these dreams unless it is to tell them? Why should these longings come to me, if they are not intended to be satisfied? Why cannot I be a Walter Scott or a Victor Hugo? Why cannot my thoughts be welcomed in the homes of England? Ay, and they shall, too—they shall!" and the young man clenched his fist as he strode onward.

By this time the aspect of the road had changed. Instead of high hedges covered by hazel bushes, tall elm trees grew by the roadside, while a little further on was a gateway, which stood at the end of a road leading up to an old-fashioned house.

"Good evenin', Merlin."

"Good evening, Jack."

"You ba'ant 'fraid of the ghost comin' up out of the addit, then?"

"No; I don't think it's been seen lately."

"Oa, the sarvent chap over to Downderry do zay that 'ee 'eard purty grooans there wawn night."

Merlin laughed.

Near where he stood, and at the end of the row of elms, was a disused mine pit, which was supposed to be haunted, and the man looked timidly towards it.

"Well, I shouldn't like to be here arter dark for oal that; but some people doan't seem to care. I do hear that Creekavose is tooked at last, after nobody livin' there oal thaise years."

"Indeed! Who has taken it?"

"Oa, a gent by the name of Granville."

"Granville! That is an old Cornish name."

"Yes; I do hear that the family was waunce very rich, but that they've lost some of their money. Still, it'll taake a few pound a year to kip up Creekavose."

"Yes, it's a fine old place, but rather lonely. Good night, Jack."

"Good night, Merlin."

Merlin walked along under the elms until he came to the gateway which formed the entrance to Creekavose, an old commodious house, which had been built long years before by a well-to-do yeoman, who had an ambition to be reckoned among the landed gentry of the county. Most of the land around had been cultivated by neighbouring farmers, but the house itself had been uninhabited for many years. The reasons for this were various. For one thing, it was said, and religiously believed among a section of the villagers, that the spirit of the old yeoman who had built it came back to earth and haunted it; moreover, it was too large for the farmers of the neighbourhood, while capitalists did not care about burying themselves in a place so remote from the busy world. Not that the place was destitute of beauty. Rather, it was much to be desired because of its

surroundings. Hill and dale, rich loamy meadows and wooded glens, appeared on every hand, while much of the land which had originally belonged to the house stretched down to the sea. As yet this part of the Cornish coast is unknown to the ordinary tourist, but there are few spots on our sea-girt island so fine. Here rugged cliffs rise many hundreds of feet above the sea, and in spite of exposure to wind and weather many a beauteous nook is to be found where luxuriant foliage grows close to the water's edge.

"Granville," mused Merlin, as he stood at the gateway and looked at the old house, which he could dimly see through the trees; "whoever he is I envy him. But I shall never know him, I suppose. A man bearing an old name, and living in such a house, must always be unknown to the clerk of Besowsa mine. If, now—if——"

Then Merlin sighed as he wandered along the lane, and he forgot to notice the primroses which covered the hedges, and failed to catch the scent of the new mown hay, because of his dreams of the life which he hoped and determined to live.

He had not gone far before a new sensation awaited him. Coming along the road he saw a young girl, a stranger to him, accompanied by a huge St. Bernard dog. Strangers were by no means common in St. Endor parish. It is true that members of the Besowsa Tin Mining Company, Limited, sometimes appeared in the neighbourhood, but they were never accompanied by ladies, hence the young lady coming along the road became an object of peculiar interest to Merlin. As she came nearer the interest increased. He saw at a glance that she was far removed from the young women of the parish. He could scarcely tell why, but her dress, her walk, the expression of her face, told him that she lived in a world different from that in which the mine girls of Besowsa or the farmers' daughters of the neighbourhood

lived. Not that she was what might be called handsome; her features were by no means perfect; but there was an expression of nobility on her face and a light shining from her eyes which revealed to the young man something of the life she lived. The face told him of many things which he could not put into words, the eyes, large and dark, spoke in a language which strangely appealed to him. Merlin felt all this rather than saw it—it came to him as an impression; and yet, had he been asked to give reasons for having these feelings concerning her, he could not have given satisfactory answers.

They passed each other without a word, but she lifted her eyes to his for a moment, and then dropped them. That one look, however, set Merlin's heart beating wildly. Like other lads, he had his dreams and fancies concerning women, but he had never followed in the wake of the village youths, whose one great object in life seemed to be to "git a maid." The women he had loved had been those he had read about in romances, or those whom he had conjured up by his own imagination. This graceful girl, however, passing by him in the country lane, her face aglow with the health of youth, her eyes reflecting the brightness of the westering sun, seemed to be the fulfilment of his dreams; she appealed to all the poetry of his nature, and set his heart throbbing with a joy that was half pain. He did not know who she was; for a moment he did not care; he only knew that from the moment their eyes met his life became new.

He did not turn and look after her; he wandered on like one in a dream, and then suddenly stopped. For a few moments he stood thinking, and then he turned and silently followed her. By this time she was out of sight—a turn in the lane had hidden her from his view; but he hurried along close to the hedge side, as if anxious to

escape observation; then, coming up to the bend in the lane, he stopped, for she had again become visible. With a strange, yearning look in his eyes, he watched her until she came to Creekavose Gate.

"Nero, Nero!" she called, and instantly the great dog came bounding back to her. "Don't you know the way to your new home, Nero?" she said, with a laugh, as she patted the dog's huge head; then she opened the gate, and disappeared beneath the shadow of elm trees which formed an avenue leading up to the house.

Again Merlin ran along on the grass which divided the road from the hedge, until he came to the gate; then he watched her until she was out of sight. For a long time he stood thinking; but, suddenly realising his position, he hurried away as though he had been doing something of which he was ashamed.

He had nearly reached Besowsa mine when, seeing a footpath through some fields which led to a wooded valley, he jumped over the stile and made his way thitherward. Presently he slackened his pace, and soon after stopped.

"She has come to live at Creekavose," he mused; "I expect she is the daughter of the new owner. Her name will be Granville." He paused for a few seconds, and again went on musing. "Anyhow, she is far removed from me. Merlin Rosevear, the clerk of Besowsa mine, has no right to speak to such as she. I wonder now, I wonder——"

He walked on again until he came to the mouth of the valley.

"Good evenin', Merlin."

"Good evening, Abraham. Prospecting, as usual?"

"Iss, I'm lookin' round a bit. Tell 'ee what, sonny, you doan't knaw haalf the lodes in Besowsa. You do jist kep on workin' 'pon the new part of the mine, and do never tich the ould men's workin's. I've heerd my faather tell of a

grand lode that th' ould men worked. They knaw'd tin, they did; as fur yer new up-the-country cap'n, he doan knaw nothin' 'bout Cornish mines."

"Well, he thinks he knows more about it than you older men, Abraham; besides, the company didn't think you knew much about the new ideas concerning mining. That was why you were asked to resign, and why Cap'n Kent was appointed in your place."

"Iss, iss, I dersay," replied the old man, sadly. "'Tis jist like the new-fangled notions to put a man like Cap'n Kent to work a mine, when he doan knaw nothin' 'bout it. But I tell 'ee, cheeld, there's a grand lode not a hundred fathoms from the injin shaft which could be worked from the thirty-fathom sollar."

"But why didn't the old men work it, Abraham?"

"Why? 'Cause they had no machinery to kip the water out, that's why."

"Well, we are working from the twenty-fathom sollar towards the old mine, Abraham."

"Iss, I do knaw. Now look, Merlin, you be the clerk of Besowsa, and you've got a map of the underground workin's. Do 'ee knaw about the addit level that do run from jist here up close to the backs, not far from your twenty-fathom sollar?"

"No, I never heard of it."

"I knaw'd you didn'. But there es, my dear, there es. Look, 'ere's the mouth of the level."

Merlin looked, and saw a hole in the hillside which seemed to run in the direction of the Besowsa mine.

"Well, now," continued Abraham, "that level do run close up to the "backs" where the men be stopin'. I spoase, now, that your cap'n do think that the ground es saafe jist there?"

"It's well timbered, Abraham."

"Well tembered!" responded the old man; "tell 'ee what, Merlin, there's hundreds of tons of stuff jist ready to fall, and it'll smash all yer temberin' like matches."

"You should tell Cap'n Kent."

"I have tould 'un, my dear. But he do knaw too much to be tould. He jist laughed. But mind, Merlin, I went underground yesterday, jist to zee, and any time the ground may fall, and the men'll either be buried or jist boxed in so that they caan't git to the engine shaft."

"Poor old man!" thought Merlin, as he walked back to his home; "he's awfully cut up at not being captain, but for all that there's no man in the county that knows as much about mining as he."

Then he ceased to think any more about Abraham or the mine, for he remembered the young girl he had seen that evening; and then all through the long night her face seemed to haunt him, while his heart went out to her in a way that he could not understand.

Five days passed away, and although Merlin Rosevear went often near Creekavose Gate, he did not see the young girl who had passed him on the Saturday evening. On the Friday following, however, when he again sat in the "'count" house, wondering how and when he should be able to meet her again, Cap'n Kent rushed into the room in breathless haste.

"I'm goin' underground, Merlin," he said.

"Anything the matter?"

"No, nothin's the matter; but Squire Granville, the gentleman who's come to Creekavose to live, and his daughter, do want to see the mine."

Merlin's heart gave a great bound.

"Do you want me to go with you, cap'n?"

"No; what good would you be? I'm goin' to show 'em

round myself, and after we've bin down I'm goin' back to Creekavose with the squire. You must go round to the floors at five o'clock and see that the ricks and buddles be all right, and taake notice that nobody do laive before the whistle do blaw."

"All right, cap'n!" said Merlin, with a sad heart.

"What time es et now?"

"Half-past two."

"Then I must be off," said the cap'n, who had by this time arrayed himself in underground attire, which consisted of a pair of duck trousers, a flannel shirt, and a hard hat, on the top of which a candle was stuck. "I promised to be at the engine shaft by twenty minutes to three. We shall go down in the big kibble. The whim will let us down."

"Yes," said Merlin; "what part of the mine are you going to?"

"Oh, nearly oal over it. But I want to shaw Squire Granville that rich piece of lode which we shall git to from the twenty-fathom sollar."

"Is it safe, do you think, cap'n?" asked Merlin, remembering Abraham Richard's words.

"Saafe? Iss, to be sure tes safe. There, I must be off; and mind, you musn't leave the count house till nearly five o'clock, cause I expect the foundry man will be here 'bout the new castings."

"Very well," said Merlin, turning wearily to his books. He worked for a few minutes, and then crept outside the account house and looked towards the engine shaft. Yes, there she was preparing to go underground. He saw the cap'n strutting around officiously, while an elderly gentleman stood talking with one of the men.

Presently they got into the "big kibble," which was a large deep wooden box; the boy who drove the "whim

horse" cracked his whip, the great wooden cylinder began to revolve, the rope which was around it began to unwind, which rope, being fastened to the "big kibble," allowed the passengers to descend slowly in the darkness underneath the soil.

Merlin returned to his books again, but he could not work. The long lines of figures were wholly incomprehensible to him, and he had no heart to understand their meaning. He seemed like one in a dream.

Hours afterwards he was aroused by a sound of shouting and a rushing of feet. He went outside and saw a man running.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Accident underground."

A great fear came into Merlin's heart. Without a second's hesitation he rushed towards the engine shaft, where a number of people had already gathered.

"What is it? What is it?" he asked, excitedly.

"Accident underground," was the reply.

"Where, where?"

"Here's the man that can tell you," was the reply; "he was the first to come to grass."

"Ah, 'Siah Truscott, where's the accident? What is it?"

"Twenty-fethom level," replied the man. "I——"

"But the cap'n and the——"

"They passed me jist as I was comin' from the cross-cut. They went along the level towards the winze."

"Yes?"

"Well, they had'n a-bin gone more'n a minute when I heerd a sound like thunder. I went toward the shaft as fast as my legs would car' me, and then I heerd the tember snap like matches."

"And the cap'n and the—the visitors?"

"I'm 'fraid," said the man, solemnly, "that they must be

buried. The ground was bad oal long there, and I see nothin' for it but they must be buried."

"But they may have got near the 'backs.'"

"Ef they did there may be a chance, for the ground es better there; but I'm terrible 'fraid. Besides, ef they've got there I'm 'fraid there's no chance. You see there's no air, and 'twould take days to git to 'em. There's thousands a tons ov stuff in the way."

"Well, start to work at once. Get as many men as you can to work."

"That's wot I'm doin', Merlin; but I'm 'feared there's no chance—noan at oal."

"There must be, there must be!" cried Merlin, frantically.

"Ef we git as many men as we can to work day and night it'll take a week," replied 'Siah Truscott. "Ef they bean't dead they're in their grave. Ther's several men with families, too, poor dears. Aw, 'ere be some ov the poor wimmen comin'."

Merlin had forgotten the miners, he had forgotten the captain; he was thinking of the young girl who out of curiosity had gone to danger, and perhaps to death. The thought maddened him. For a time he seemed wholly demented; then, with a strange light in his eyes he started running towards a valley in the near distance.

"God grant—oh, *God* grant it may be true!" he gasped, as he ran on.

CHAPTER II

IN THE OLD MINE

MERLIN had gone but a few hundred yards when he stopped suddenly.

"It is no use my trying without light and without a pick," he said to himself, whereupon he turned and ran towards the 'count house, casting as he did so hurried glances towards the engine shaft, where people congregated rapidly. No one seemed to notice him; all attention was given to the men who had been underground, and were able to tell something about the falling of the stuff, and the possible condition of those working in that part of the mine.

He rushed into the office, hastily put on a miner's hat, on which was stuck a piece of candle ready for use, seized a box of matches, some candles, a pick, and then without waiting ran a second time towards the valley where he had met Abraham Richards the Saturday night previous. Arrived there, he looked eagerly around among the bushes to find the mouth of the level, which the old man had pointed out on that occasion, but in his excitement failed to see it.

"What a fool I was not to take more notice of the old man's words," he cried. "Of course it may mean nothing, but it seems the only chance," and again he hurried to and fro in hopes of finding the level.

"I must keep cool," he thought at length, "else I shall

be useless. I should have found it before now if I were not so excited. Let me see, now. I came down by yonder path, old Abraham was standing just here, and we went along by those bushes, close to the little stream. Ah! there it is!"

Yes, there was the level, nearly hidden by bushes, and its mouth half filled up by a heap of rocks which had fallen.

Like a madman he leaped on the rocks, pulled away some of the larger ones, and groped his way into the darkness. He soon found himself knee-deep in water, and the air was cold and vault-like.

"That stuff has dammed back the water," he thought; and then with trembling hands he lit a match, and soon the candle on the top of his hat gave forth a flickering light.

"I wonder if the level is timbered further in?" he thought, "not that it'll be much good if it is. The wood will be rotten long before now, and if the ground is fallen it will be impossible for me to get to them."

His heart became heavy as lead at the thought, and he imagined the fair girl whom he had seen a few days before either crushed beneath a vast heap of fallen rock or entombed in terrible darkness, a hundred and twenty feet beneath the soil.

"Oh, I'll save her, I *will* save her!" he gasped.

He groped his way along the level, the water becoming shallower at each step, and he noticed as he went that the sides were destitute of any woodwork, but that the ground seemed perfectly safe. He had a good idea of locality, and his years of underground life enabled him to judge of the direction he was going even although he had nothing to guide him. He was also able to tell pretty nearly the distance he had gone at any given period, for this also is a knowledge which a miner gains through working underneath the soil, where landmarks are few.

Presently his heart seemed to stand still, for when he had gone what he thought must be about half the distance between the mouth of the level and the backs to which he fearfully hoped this level might lead, and where he still more fearfully hoped Miss Granville and her father were, the level seemed to stop. For a moment he sat down in utter despair. He must be at least a hundred fathoms from the entombed miners, and there appeared no possibility of his getting any further. Old Abraham Richards was wrong. Evidently the old miners had abandoned the level. And yet why should Abraham say it reached the new workings, or, at any rate, came close to it? Then another thought struck him. If the level reached the new workings, why had the present miners not discovered it? As far as he could see, he might as well get back while he was able, and yet how could he go and leave——

He started up again, determined to leave nothing undone that lay in his power to do. A great heap of rubbish lay at his feet; he looked above him, and found that the "old men" had been stoping—*i.e.*, working upwards. Why had they done this? Probably the level was driven to work a lode. If that were so, they must have had some reason for stoping. He looked carefully around, and discovered that there was a cross-cut—that is, another level branched from it.

With fast-beating heart he entered the cross-cut, but did not go far. It was leading him right away from the direction where the accident had taken place. Wearily he came back again. By this time the candle on the top of his hat had burnt out, but he lit another, carefully pressed some clay at its end, and then stuck it to the hard miner's hat.

He examined what seemed the end of the level, and then gave a cry of joy. It was only a pile of rock which had fallen. He slowly crept up the rough heap, carrying his

pick in his hand. When he had got some distance he stopped for breath.

"I think it continues," he mused; "but it seems as though the old men altered their course a bit."

He spoke aloud, and he was almost frightened at the sound of his own voice, but a moment later it struck him that his voice echoed not only along the road by which he had come, but also before him. If that were so there must be an open space in that direction.

"Holloa!" he said, louder.

Yes; his voice echoed not only behind him and along the cross-cut, but before him. Old Abraham Richards was right.

He peered carefully around him. Yes, there was a hole before him. The ground which had fallen had only partly filled up the space. He crawled along the hole; at first there was barely room for his body, but presently it grew larger, and by-and-by he found himself in a level that was fairly intact. The course was altered—of that he was sure; but that might mean nothing wrong. Possibly the direction of the lode had been altered by another, for which the cross-cut had been driven. Then he remembered that he would have to return the same way, and if he found Miss Granville she, too, must pass through that dark hole. It was lucky he had brought his pick; it might be of service to him. He had plenty of candles, and he lit one and stuck it close to the hole. It would burn for an hour or two.

Again he plodded on, and again he noticed that the level was driven through good ground; only here and there had a rock fallen from the top, as if to remind him of the accident which had happened in the new part of the mine.

Presently he felt very faint, and putting his hand to his forehead he found that it was bleeding. His head must have struck against some jagged corner, either as he walked

along or as he crawled through the hole, but which in his excitement he had not noticed. Still, the cut was not deep, and after having bound his handkerchief around it, he prepared to go on again.

It was terribly lonely, and for a moment he felt afraid. All the old stories of his childhood came back to him, and it seemed as though those old men who drove this level, and who had been dead for many a long year, were all around him. He wondered what battles they had to fight, and what passions had surged within them. Possibly no foot but his own had been there for forty or fifty long years, while they who last stood there were dead and forgotten. For a moment he forgot his errand—forgot the mission of love upon which he had come; but when it came back to him again, he upbraided himself for wasting precious time.

Merlin toiled on again along the dreary opening, which had been dug by the hands of men, until he felt as though he must be nearing the spot where the accident had taken place. This thought had scarcely come into his mind before he realised that the level was widening into an open place. A few yards further and he saw what seemed like a large cavern. He looked carefully around. This was evidently the end of the level. Around were great heaps of rocks which had evidently fallen from the roof of the cavern; but there were no evidences of the level continuing farther. At one end of the open space was a heap of stuff, which lay loose, but there was no opening anywhere. Most likely there had been what in miners' parlance was called a "bunch of tin"—that is, a deposit of rock containing tin had by some freak of nature been found there, instead of running in lodes or veins, as is usually the case. This the "old men" had worked, and, when exhausted, they had left it, as they had left that part of the mine altogether.

What was he to do?

He could not get any farther, and he might be ten, fifteen, or twenty fathoms from the new mine. He did not think he could be much further than that. He had a pretty correct idea of the distance he had come, also of the direction, and a man who has been reared among the mines is not often mistaken. But to cut a passage through fifteen fathoms of rock, even if he knew the exact direction, would mean many weeks' work. On every side of the cavern was a solid wall, save one, and that was where a huge heap of rubbish had fallen; but there was no outlet anywhere, save by the way he had come.

Again despair got hold of him. He had now done his all, and he seemed as far away from rescuing them as ever. And he felt that he loved this girl to whom he had never spoken, and who was possibly entombed—loved her so much that he would be willing to give a hundred lives to save her if he had them.

He sat down on a heap of stones and tried to think, while the silence of the place became more and more terrible. For a time it rendered him incapable of coherent thought; besides, his head throbbed painfully. Presently, however, it seemed less ominous, less hard to bear. He got up, and began to explore the cavern. As he groped around, his shoe struck a piece of iron, and the clank, caused by the blow, faintly echoed along the dark tunnel through which he had come. Stooping down to examine what he had kicked, he discovered a rusty miner's pick, which in all possibility had been lying there for half a century. He picked it up in order to inspect it more closely, but hastily threw it down again. There was something repellent in the thought of handling a tool which men now dead had used long years before. Under other circumstances he would have thought nothing of it, but here in the silence it made him shudder.

Again and again he walked around the cavern, and on every hand he saw a solid wall, save one. Here there was loose stuff, which looked as though it had been piled against the roof of the cavern, or, as the miners called it, "the backs." What the loose pile meant he could not divine; none the less, however, it appeared as formidable an obstacle as the smooth sides of the cave which the old miners had cut with so much patience.

Merlin's effort was vain, then. He must go back without doing what he had hoped, and yet the thought of finding his way back through the darkness alone was terrible to contemplate. As a drowning man seeks to grasp at every straw, so did Merlin's mind fasten upon every foolish scheme which seemed to give the shadow of hope. But nothing seemed to come of them all.

The second candle was burning low; how long he had been underground he did not know, and his reason seemed to be leaving him. Like one demented he gave a shout. "Holloa!"

The hoarse cry made a strange noise as it found its way along the silent tunnels, but it died away at length, and the silence seemed greater than before.

His heart seemed to stand still, for he thought he heard a sound which appeared to come from many miles away, and yet which might be an answering cry. Possibly his imagination had conjured up the sound, or it might be real.

He filled his lungs with air, and then, gathering all his strength, he gave another and a louder shout. Again the sound reverberated through the gloomy silence and died away, and then, after some seconds, he heard a faint, feeble response. He feared lest it should be the distant echo of his own cry, but he did not think it was. Moreover, the sound seemed to come from that part of the cavern where the loose *débris* lay.

He seized his pick, and climbed up the jagged stones as far as he was able. Then he struck a rock several times with the head of the tool.

"Rap, rap, rap, rap!"

The noise echoed and re-echoed, then all was silent. Merlin waited for some minutes breathlessly, but he heard no answering sound.

With heavy heart he crept along the stones, and knocked again.

"Rap, rap, rap, rap!"

He waited until the echoes had died away, and again listened. He thought he heard a sound as if of scraping, and then his heart gave a great leap.

"Rap, rap, rap, rap!" came the response.

He struck the rock again, six times on this occasion, instead of four. If the response was simply the echo of his own pick, there would be six blows in return. For a time his heart beat so loud that he thought he should never be able to hear any answer, but he was mistaken. He heard the knocks plainly.

One, two, three, four, five. Then there was silence.

Yes, he had surely discovered them; they were probably only a very few feet from him, for sound travels slowly through such channels.

He lit a new candle, and started to work. His experience of mining stood him in good stead now, for because of it he was able to do more than two or three unskilled men could have done in the same time. Feverishly he dug away at the loose stones, and when he had penetrated some two or three feet he paused, and gave the signals he had given before.

This time the answering sound was evidently nearer; he was working in the right direction. With renewed energy he continued digging until he had penetrated some distance further, then he stopped for breath.

"Holloa!"

This time the response was given more quickly, but it seemed very weak, very far away.

Wondering what it could mean, he still worked on, but the further he dug the more difficult he found it; the loose stuff was constantly falling down, filling up the passage he was trying to make. Still, he knew this must be, and toiled on. His hands became very sore, but he did not heed; his head ached terribly, but he dared not cease his efforts. It was a matter of life and death. After some minutes he decided to try and signal again. He scraped away the rubbish he had been digging, and then with the head of his pick struck heavily against a large stone.

Before there was time for an answer to be given, he saw, to his great joy, that the rock fell away from him, and heard a rattling noise on the other side of the passage he was trying to make.

"Holloa!"

There was a feeble response given, but Merlin, in his haste to push his way towards the spot from whence the sound came, struck his candle against the roof of the cave, and he was in utter darkness. Evidently the people whom he came to save had been lying in darkness. Still, he had matches and other candles, and prepared to light them. Then he remembered he had left them beside the rusty tool of the old miners.

"Hold up!" he cried; "I'll be with you in a minute;" then he waited for a reply.

No answer came, however.

He scrambled down the pile of rocks, and began to grope around for the candles and matches, but in his excitement failed to find them.

"What an idiot I am!" he cried. "They may be dying, and I am fooling away the time like this!" Presently his

hand touched something, and he picked it up. Feeling it, he discovered it to be an old shoe. This also the "old men" had left, and in his excitement it seemed as though their spirits had come back to mock him. He threw the thing from him, and then after some weary seconds found what he desired. Lighting another candle, he climbed towards the hole again, and with fast-beating heart crept into the place from whence the response to his signals had come.

At first he could see nothing, for his candle went nearly out, and it was with great difficulty that he breathed. After a little time, however, the flame became larger, and the air became better; then he saw lying on the floor of the cave several prostrate forms. Like a madman he went from one to the other in search of her for whom he had been so anxious, but he did not see her; his heart became like lead, for he felt sure that he was too late. Death had been before him, and was the victor.

CHAPTER III

HOW MERLIN FOUND HELEN GRANVILLE

FOR a few minutes Merlin Rosevear stood amidst the prostrate forms in despair; he knew why life had left the bodies of those who lay at his feet. It was as 'Siah Truscott had said, there was no air. After breathing a short time, they had consumed all the oxygen, and, like the people in the Black Hole of Calcutta, they became suffocated; that was why he breathed with so much difficulty, and why the candle burnt so dimly when he entered. The foul air had a difficulty in escaping, and the purer atmosphere the same difficulty in entering. Had he reached them half an hour before, it might have been different; but he had done his best.

He began to look around the cavern again. It was only partly filled with the huge pile of rocks which had fallen from "the backs." It might be that at the other end of the cave others might be lying—*she* might be lying.

With a shudder he picked his way among the prostrate forms, until he came to a dark corner; then he gave a cry, for, with her head supported by a piece of rock, crouched the girl he had seen the Saturday before. Her face was strangely white, and her eyes were closed. Near her was the gentleman he recognised as her father. He, too, lay stiff and stark, while close by him was Captain Kent.

He took Miss Granville's hand in his; they were cold as

death. Then he knelt down, and placed his ear over her heart.

He heard it beating!

Yes, it beat, slowly and feebly, but life was not extinct. Perhaps—perhaps all might be saved. The place was now filling with better air, and he remembered that a man spoke to him not long before his candle went out. In his excitement and disappointment at not seeing Miss Granville, he had forgotten this; but it might be that this man, at least, could be restored.

What could he do?

It was a strange situation, and he was almost incapable of thinking coherently. Still, a great joy filled his heart, in spite of the fact that he saw still, prostrate forms lying all around him. *She* was not dead! He placed his ear over her heart again. Yes, it beat more strongly. She would live!

He went back to the hole he had made, and felt the slight current of air that came through; then he looked around for the man that lay nearest the hole. He had no difficulty in discovering which had signalled to him. Even now a pick lay in his hands. He took one of the miner's hands in his. Yes, he, too, was alive. He was not too late after all—at least, to save some. His plan now was to hurry out and tell what he had done and seen; then a party of miners would come to the rescue. Yes; that must be his method of procedure. His eyes turned towards the end of the cave where Miss Granville lay. No, he could not leave her; he could not. She might die if left there; besides, suppose she came to consciousness, and found nothing but darkness and the still forms of the entombed miners! No; he could not leave her in such a way. The men did not matter so much; they would not mind so much. Besides, he could leave one of his candles burning,

and they would know what to do. But he dared not leave her.

He tried to discover if her father was alive, but could not be sure; he was too distracted to judge correctly. Besides, the forms of the miners lying around him presented a ghastly spectacle, and he felt like crying out in fear. His overstrained nerves were giving way. He was not far from madness!

Scarcely knowing what he was doing, but possessed by a great longing to save Miss Granville, he took her in his arms and carried her towards the hole through which he had come, and then with great difficulty lifted her through it. When he was alone with her in the next cave a great joy surged through his heart. He possessed this beautiful girl! He longed to kiss her cold lips and call her endearing names; but something, he could not tell what, forbad him doing so. Perhaps her very unconsciousness was a sentinel which guarded her!

His head throbbed wildly, and his limbs trembled beneath him, but, as if impelled by an overmastering force, he prepared to carry her through the gloomy level out into the light. She lay perfectly passive in his arms. She might have been dead for all the movement she made. So still was she that Merlin, in fear, put his ear to her heart again, but life was not extinct. The heart was still beating—feebly, it is true, but the young man knew she was alive.

He took his coat from his back, tore it into strips, and with the strips made a kind of rope, which he fastened around his shoulders. Then he took the young girl in his arms, after which he fastened the rope around her body in such a way as to keep her weight from falling so much on her arms. After this he staggered slowly down the level, bearing the burden for which he felt he would have died. It was a strange experience. His footsteps echoed along the level,

while the candle on the top of his hat cast a flickering light all around, so that shadows seemed to come out of the darkness as if to mock him. But he grew bolder at each step. He was nearing the light, and surely—surely he was saving the young girl for whom he had conceived such an ardent love! When he had seen her in the cave near the forms of the miners, and thought her dead, it seemed as though life had lost its meaning. He never realised till then how he loved her; and now as he carried her on to the light his strength seemed to increase, for great hopes surged within his breast.

Presently he came to the spot where he had placed a candle, and where the level had changed its course. Here, too, a pile of stuff had fallen, and the passage was narrow. He slipped the rope from his back, and laid his precious burden carefully on the ground. He watched her face as he did so, and he saw her eyelids quiver. She was coming back to life.

For the first time he realised his own personal appearance. His clothes were badly torn, his jacket had been torn into strips, so that he might the more easily carry her. He felt the blood and the sweat trickle down his face, while his handkerchief was tied across his forehead to cover the wound that had been made there. He was almost afraid for her to be restored to consciousness just then; the sight of him might frighten her. Still, better that she should open her eyes to the living than to the dead.

He began to chafe her hands.

"You are getting better," he said.

She opened her eyes, and looked around her like one in a dream.

"You are getting better," he repeated.

"Where am I?" She said this like those who talk in their sleep. She was only half conscious of her existence,

"You met with an accident," he said. "Don't you remember? You went underground with your father and Captain Kent, and the ground fell, while you escaped to the open place at the end of the level."

She shuddered.

"I remember," she said; "where's my father?"

"I hope he is all right," replied Merlin, "but I am trying to get you to the open air."

"But how did you get to us? Captain Kent said there could be no chance of being rescued for days, and then we had a difficulty in breathing, and then——" She shuddered again.

"I heard of this level—heard that it led up close to the place where the ground fell in. That was how—— But I can tell you another time."

"But who are you? There is blood on your face. You are wounded."

"That is nothing. My name is Merlin Rosevear. I passed you last Saturday evening. Don't you remember? It was not far from Creekavose Gate."

"Yes, I remember. But—but the cave in which we were entombed was blocked in on every hand. How did you get to me?"

"Oh, that was easy. I had a pick, and dug towards you. You see, I know the mine, and no one but myself knew about this level but old Abraham Richards."

"And how far is my father and the others away from here?" she asked, anxiously.

"About a hundred fathoms."

"And how came I here?"

"I—I carried you," he said.

She looked at him in a way which he could not understand, and was silent.

"I will remove these stones," he said, "and then we shall

be able to get through this hole; after that we shall soon get to the open air."

She did not speak, and Merlin madè the passage through which he had come some time before, sufficiently large for her to get through with comparative ease.

"I think you can get through now," he said.

"But my father?" she said, anxiously.

"Pure air is now entering the place where they are lying," he said. "I think they may have recovered by this."

"But you will send help?"

"As soon as ever you are out."

"Not before?"

"Not unless I leave you here alone. I have no one to send. I came alone."

Again she shuddered as if in fear.

"Let us get out quickly," she said.

"I will go first," he said. "You can take my hand, and I will help you through."

She grasped his hand eagerly, and a few minutes later they were in the level which ran in a nearly straight line to the open valley.

"There is not room for two of us to walk abreast," he said. "I will go first, and you can follow me."

"Let me hold fast to your hand," she said, timidly.

He held out his hand, and then staggered along the level.

"How far is it to the end?" she asked.

"About a hundred fathoms," he said.

"And how long will it take us to reach there?" she asked.

"I do not know," he said. "I—I am afraid I can do no more for you. I—I think I am ill."

He stumbled heavily forward as he spoke, and in a moment more fell to the ground, his head being supported by the side of the level against which he lay.

"Go straight on, and you will find your way out," he said faintly. "Then go to the engine-shaft and tell—tell——"

He said no more, for he became unconscious. His overstrained nature at last gave way, and he was no longer able to do what he had ventured so much to accomplish.

For a time the young girl seemed too stunned to know what to do. Then she remembered that her only means of helping him and saving her father was to find her way to the valley, as he had suggested. It was terrible to leave him alone in the darkness, and yet it was the only thing she could do.

She clasped his hands, but they lay perfectly limp. She took the candle from his hard "hat-cap," and tried to examine the wound on his forehead, but she soon realised that she could do no good in this way. It seemed an ungracious thing to leave him there, but it might be long before he recovered, and there was no other means of helping him; she shuddered at the thought of finding her way along the level alone, but it was the way, not only to her own safety, but to that of others.

From his waistcoat hung another candle, the last he had. It was twisted and broken, but she took it from him, and in spite of her past terrible experiences lit it with a fairly steady hand. Then holding the light in her hand, and with a strange yearning look towards Merlin, she groped along the level.

At last her heart gave a great leap, for away in front of her was light—the light of day. It was only a faint streak, but it was different from the yellow light of the candle. With a cry of joy she hastened forward, and yet the cry she gave was half a sob, for her heart was sore at the thought of leaving her rescuer alone in the silence of the dark tunnel. Still it was her only means of saving him. She could not help him by staying at his side. At least, so she thought.

With many a fear, and with fast-beating heart, she struggled towards the light, and a few minutes later she crept out of the dark level into the light.

It was now evening, and the brightness of day was fast departing, but to her, after more than five hours of dense darkness, it was glaring. At first she looked around her, not realising where she was. The thought of her past experiences and her safety seemed to daze her. She felt faint and dizzy too, but by a supreme effort of the will she mastered herself. Then she bathed her forehead in the stream which ran close to where she stood, and after drinking of the cold water, she felt better. No sooner, however, did her own strength begin to return to her, than she realised the peril of those she had left, and remembering Merlin's words, she hurried towards the engine-shaft.

As I said, the shades of evening were now gathering, and she had a difficulty in finding her way to the spot, where a group of people still remained, waiting for news from those who had gone underground.

It was a sorrowful gathering which stood by the engine-house, and not one of the sad-eyed watchers spoke aloud. They seemed afraid. In subdued tones they talked one to another, shaking their heads when they spoke of the mission upon which a dozen miners had gone.

"There ca'ant be no chance," said one.

"No; Siah Truscott do zay it'll taake days to git to 'em. Poor Betty Martin! an' it'll be a wisht Sunday for she when it do come. Two of her booys and her ould man tooked away in a minnit. Aw, tes terrible 'ard."

"Iss," replied another; "we must all pray for her. The Loard is the Father of the fatherless, and the 'usband of the widda."

"And ed'nt et terrible too that Squire Granville and the young laady shud 'a' gone down at sich a time. They

cudden 'a' bin down more'n a nour or so, afore they was both killed."

"Iss, and she did seem so peart and pleasant too. Look, who's that comin' runnin'?"

"'Tes a maid of some sort. Who can it be?"

"Dunnaw, I'm sure; but she's comin' this way."

"Aw, dear! but 'twill be awful wisht to be 'bout here at nights now. Their spirits may take to hauntin' the plaace."

"Look, thickey maid es comin' 'ere. Why, tes like that Miss Granville."

"So tes—why tes she!"

"But it caan't be she—why she's—law! it caan't be her spirit, can it?"

For a minute they were all held by one belief that the visitor was not human, and a great fear crept into their hearts.

"Tes she, tes she. Look, she've got the same clothes, only she ain't a got no 'at, and her hair es streamin' down her back. She's come back for some purpose, prap's to tell us somethin', like Betsy Knight's booy comed to hes mawther when he was drowned. Aw, 'ere's Siah Truscott. Siah, you're a prayer laider—spaik to 'er, my dear, spaik to her proper, my dear. She wa'ant hurt a prayer laider, and a man ov the Loard."

The young girl came up slowly, for her strength was now nearly gone. She was pale to the lips, and her eyes were shining with an unnatural light. She came close to the excited group, and then stopped. "Help!" she said.

"In the naame of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who be you?" said Siah Truscott, solemnly.

"Help!" she repeated.

"But who be you?" repeated the miner with trembling voice.

"I am Helen Granville," she replied. "Come and help."

"Doan't be lured away with a sperrit," said an old woman who stood by.

"Be you in the flesh or in the sperrit?" asked Siah. To him it was impossible that she should have escaped. There was, he thought, no other way that any one could come than by the engine-shaft, while she came from the valley; and to the Cornishman, reared in an atmosphere of superstition, this must be the spirit of the young girl, who was either the sport of Satan, or else come with a message from the dead.

"I've escaped," she said, excitedly. "A young man, called Merlin Rosevear, came to us and has helped me out. But he lies in the level unconscious. Come and help. Bring stretchers and all may be saved. My father is there —oh! do come quickly."

"But how did 'ee git out?" said Siah Truscott, excitedly. "There's no other way than by the ingin-shaft."

"Yes, that young man knew of an old level. A man called Abraham Richards told him."

"Lev me feel yer hand, to be sure you be tellin' the truth," said the old woman, Betsy Flew by name.

The young girl held out her hand, and cried piteously, "Don't wait; come at once!"

"Her 'and es warm and plum" (soft), cried Betsy. "The maid do tell the truth."

"Hurrah!" cried some.

"Praise the Lord!" said others more religiously inclined.

"I was wonderin' where Merlin was," said Siah, "and now——"

"Come!" cried Helen Granville; "don't wait."

"Tell us what you do knaw," cried Siah, "and we'll come, but we do want to knaw what things to take."

Rapidly she told her story, and a few minutes later a

shout of joy echoed through the evening air, while the men hurried to the valley, and Betsey, with tottering footsteps, went to the cottages to tell the story.

When they came to the level, Siah Truscott, who became the leader of the band, asked one of the men to take Helen Granville home, but she refused.

"No!" she said, "I will go with you. See, I am strong, and I want to get to my father."

No further resistance was made, and they entered the level.

"How fur up did 'ee laive Merlin then, miss?" said one of the men.

"He said we were about a hundred fathoms from the mouth of the level," she said, and again they toiled forward.

"It was just here," she said presently, looking around; "I know it was about here. I remember this rock."

Each man carried a candle, and thus the level was lit up brightly.

"But he edn' 'ere now, miss."

"Here's his hat-cap," said another, "and a candle. Where can he be?"

"Aw, and this 'es blood upon this stone too."

The young girl looked eagerly around, but nowhere could Merlin Rosevear be seen.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER THE ACCIDENT

FOR a few seconds there was a silence, then Siah Truscott said, "He may be gone out, mates. Perhaps he got better sooner than the young laady thought he would, and comed out by hisself."

"But why ded'a laive hes candle and hat-cap?" said another.

"Perhaps he've gone on to the place where the ground have falled in," added a third; "perhaps he's thinkin' to help out the others."

A great fear laid hold of Helen Granville's heart. "We ought to have seen him if he came out," she said, "he must have gone back to the place where the rest are. Perhaps he's trying to help my father. Come, let us go on."

She did not realise that she was doing a strange thing in being with these men alone in an old disused level. The circumstances of the case drove away all such thoughts; neither did she realise any fear. The thought of her father lying in the darkness, and the fact that she had been rescued from an awful peril by one who had mysteriously disappeared drove away such a possibility. Her strength was sustained by a great excitement, and so she urged the miners on to action.

They went on until they came to the heap of rubbish that had fallen in the level, and again stopped.

"Listen," she said, excitedly.

Every miner stood still, scarcely daring to breathe, while from the cross-cut close by there came a sound like a moan.

Without thinking, she hurried towards the spot from whence the sound came, and then started back in fear, for Merlin Rosevear lay on the ground, his head in a pool of his own blood.

"He've a killed hisself, sure nough," said Siah Truscott; "see the great gash in his brow!"

Then Helen Granville's unnatural strength gave way, she felt as though streams of icy water were passing through her veins instead of warm blood, the forms of the miners around her became dim and ghostly. She heard a sound like the roaring of many waters in her ears, and then she remembered no more.

When she woke to consciousness she was lying in her own bed, in her own room. The morning sunlight streamed into the room, while the birds sang merrily on the trees which surrounded the house. For a time she could not think coherently, she had a confused memory of gloomy caverns, and strange pathways, but nothing was real to her. Presently, however, she remembered the past, but even now it seemed to be rather a ghastly nightmare through which she had passed, than a reality. Still she knew it was more than a dream. The fact of her going with her father to the mine, and the descent into the shaft were real enough, it was the terrible experiences which followed that seemed so vague, but she knew they had taken place.

The door of her room opened, and an old servant entered.

"My father, Hannah?" she said.

"It's all right, Miss Helen, he's home all safe and sound."

A great sob of relief escaped her, then—"And that young

man who found us, Hannah? Have you heard about him?"

"The doctor came from him about an hour ago. He's very ill."

"But he will get better?"

"The doctor hopes so, Miss Helen; but he fears concussion of the brain, or brain fever. He has an awful wound in the head. But you are better. You were coming around last night, just after you were brought home, but the doctor gave you some sleeping medicine, so that you might not wake until—ah, here's the doctor coming."

The village surgeon entered as she spoke. A little dapper man he was, one apparently of no particular skill, but evidently possessing a large modicum of common-sense. He looked kind, too, and just the person an invalid might trust.

"Ah, Miss Granville," he said, cheerfully, with that western accent peculiar to Cornish people, "and so you're awake at last! Well, you are all right, and cured of the desire to go underground for a bit, eh? I don't think you'll do for a miner, I really don't."

"And my father——?"

"Getting on finely. Don't trouble a bit about him. All that were in the cave will, I think, pull through, too. It was lucky Merlin Rosevear came so soon, not a bit too soon, though, from all I can hear."

"And how is he, Dr. Hawke?"

"Doesn't my name fit me well?" he said, with a laugh, "ar'n't I just like a bird of prey, eh?" patting his round good-humoured face, upon which in spite of himself a shadow of doubt rested. "He's as well as can be expected, Miss Granville; but he must have gone through some strange experiences, and he has a nasty cut in his head. He has lost much blood, too; but we'll pull him through, I

hope, so don't worry. He behaved like a hero, anyhow," he added, after a pause.

"Yes, he saved us all."

"He did, indeed; but if I were you, I would think no more about it. I've ordered a special breakfast for you, and——"

"But, doctor, you think young Rosevear will live?"

"I hope so, I'll do my best. Wasn't it lucky that old Abraham Richards should have told him about the level. That old man seems to know everything about mining. He was away all day yesterday, and didn't get home till late at night, and he told me about the talk he had with Merlin."

"I do hope, oh, I do hope he will get better," she said, in a husky voice.

Dr. Hawke knew it would be no use telling her again not to think about the young man who had delivered her, her mind was now too full of the accident, so he talked as pleasantly about it as he could.

"He's a fine young fellow, is Rosevear," he said, cheerfully, "he's more brains than any one in the parish, parson and doctor included. If he has a fair chance he'll make his mark in the world."

"He's a miner, is he not?"

"He's the mine clerk, but he won't remain in that position long. He has literary tastes, and for a young countryman has read very widely. I asked him to let me read one of his stories one day, and although it was crudely written, and sadly wanted touching up, it had a great deal of power. You must talk with him when he gets better, Miss Granville. He is rather proud, but he'll be delighted for you to speak kindly to him. You ought to, too."

"Oh, he has literary ambitions?" she said, in a tone of interest.

"Yes; I believe he kept it quiet as long as he could, but his mother told some woman about it, and then—well, you know what then," and the little doctor laughed. "But I must not talk too long with you, Miss Granville," continued the little man; "your pulse is beating far too fast, and your eyes are shining far too brightly. There, your special breakfast is coming, and mind you take what I have ordered. Don't trouble about anything, for really everything is going on all right. Good morning. I'll call again in the afternoon." And he noiselessly left the room.

Helen Granville did not obey the doctor's orders with regard to the breakfast. She was far too excited. Again and again the sound of the falling rocks and the cracking of timber rang in her ears, while the cry of the miners as they rushed towards the cave was terrible to think about. Still, all was well. Through the bravery of one young man all had been saved; through him she was lying in her own comfortable bed, instead of entombed in the mine.

Through the morning she thought much of Merlin Rosevear. Naturally. She remembered passing him a week before in the lane, and thinking what a striking looking fellow he was. The thought of him in the level, however, while the candles of the miners revealed him lying with his head in a pool of his own blood, was not pleasant to contemplate. Still he was better, the doctor said, and would probably recover. Should she go and see him? It seemed her duty, and she would ask Dr. Hawke when he came again. As the hours passed away she caught herself fancying what kind of stories and poems he wrote. She would like to see them.

Thoughts like these led her to forget to an extent the experiences of the day before, so that when Dr. Hawke came about five o'clock he said she might get up and go into her father's room. Mr. Granville was doing well, he

said, but his nerves had been terribly shaken, and so must have quietness for a day or two.

"And Mr. Rosevear, doctor?" she asked, anxiously.

"Oh, he will pull through, but he must be kept quiet for at least a week. I can allow no visitors until that time."

"After that, do you think I ought to call?"

"Yes, I think you might."

"And meanwhile, I—I hope he has everything necessary?"

"The Rosevears are very respectable people," replied the doctor, divining her meaning, "very frugal, saving people, and are in a position to get all he needs. Besides, the villagers are very kind. Still I think that any delicacy sent from this house—sent in the same spirit as you might send to the Rectory, or to Trebarton Manor—would be kindly received. The Rosevears are proud," he added, after a pause.

Helen found her father more nervous than she expected, but he made few complaints; Fortescue Granville was a quiet, self-contained man—all the more, perhaps, because he had been disappointed. Some time before this story commenced he had, through foolish speculation, lost much of his money, with the result that he had to sell the estate he had called his, and adopt a simpler and less expensive mode of living. Creekavose, quaint and interesting as it was, compared badly with Trewinion Manor—at least, according to his ideas—and consequently he felt the change unpleasantly. Still, he remembered that he was Fortescue Granville, the possessor of one of the oldest names in the county, and that, although he was far from rich, he and his daughter were regarded as inferior to none who figured prominently in the best society.

He had formed very ambitious plans concerning his

daughter Helen. She had received an education befitting her station, and he hoped that in a year or two she would be mistress of one of the old Cornish mansions. Doubtless his loss of fortune had made him more eager for this, especially as his only brother was rich and influential, and, being a jealous man, he could not bear the thought of his daughter occupying a poorer position than that of her cousins.

He had visited the mine on the day previous, partly to satisfy his daughter's curiosity, and partly to learn whether he could safely invest some little capital he still possessed in the Besowsa mine. Moreover, he had obtained some knowledge of mining, and had a shrewd suspicion that the fields he had bought with Creekavose House would some day be made valuable through being opened up for mining operations. In the meantime, he had still enough wealth to live quietly and comfortably, and, if need be, on rare occasions, to invite his old friends to visit him.

"Father, I'm so glad, so thankful you are getting better!" cried Helen, as she sat by his side.

"I'm all right except that I feel shaky and nervous," he replied. "We had a marvellous escape, child."

"We had indeed, father. I hardly dare think about it."

"Do you know anything of the young man who rendered us such signal service?"

"Dr. Hawke tells me his name is Rosevear, and that he is the mine clerk. I suppose he told you that?"

"Ah, yes. Well, we must think of some way of rewarding him," he said, with a sigh. "Meanwhile, as soon as I am well enough, I will send a letter."

"I thought perhaps I might call and see him," she said, presently.

"Yes," he replied, after a pause; "I think it would be graceful if you called just once. The family will think

much of a visit from you. They are worthy people, too, so Hawke tells me."

"He is quite a genius, I suppose?"

"A village genius," he said, with a smile; "every village lad who knows a little more than his companions is called a genius." He closed his eyes wearily. "I feel very weak," he said; "I hope I shall be better to-morrow."

The next day was Sunday, and Helen found her way into the old-fashioned garden. She had been at Creekavose only a short time, and had not ceased to delight in the rustic quaintness of the place. No doubt Trewinion was much finer, but it did not attract her as much as her new home. To live near the sea, too, was what she had always longed for, and the footpaths, which led to the Atlantic, through green meadows and wooded dells, were a source of delight.

After wandering around the garden for a few minutes, she wended her way to the cliffs, and soon the sight of the broad waters did much to alleviate the dark thoughts which, in spite of her utmost endeavours, haunted her. There is always something health-giving and inspiring about the broad expanse of the sea. It destroys all idea of narrowness and false limitations. Under the influence of the sunlit sea, the gloom of the dark mine seemed to pass away, and she caught herself singing snatches of songs. Feeling stronger at each breath she drew, she found her way to the shore, and then, sitting on a rock, she drank in the wild beauty of the rock-bound coast. So intent on the scene was she that she did not notice an easel near her, neither was she cognisant of the fact that she was watched by a young fellow of about seven-and-twenty years of age, who was evidently the possessor of the easel, as well as the canvas which was placed thereon. After sitting a few minutes, she got up and went southward, still unconscious

that the eyes of the young man followed her until, getting behind a huge rock, she was hidden from his sight.

When she turned to come back, however, she saw the easel, while the artist reclined against a rock, looking across the blue waters. This time it was he who was unconscious of being watched. She had to come close to him in order to get to the path which led to her home, but the yellow sand in which she walked was so smooth and hard that she made but little sound. Besides, the murmur of the sea was loud enough to make it impossible for the young man to hear the sound of footsteps. She gave a hurried glance at the easel, and saw the line of coast faithfully portrayed. Evidently the artist had not been working on his picture that morning. He had neither paints nor brushes near him. Probably he had brought his picture to compare it with the scene he had been painting. But he was not looking at it now. He continued to gaze seaward, and Helen, as she passed on, could not help noticing the strange yearning expression on his face. A few minutes later, however, she had practically forgotten she had seen him. It was years before they saw each other again, and then under entirely different circumstances.

The following Saturday Helen Granville went to see Merlin Rosevear. True to his word, her father had written a letter very cordially thanking Merlin for his great service, and expressing the hope that he might in the future be able to render him some service. It was the letter, however, of a man in a superior position writing to one in an inferior one. There was no hint of social distinction, yet the whole tone of the epistle implied it.

When Merlin received it his heart beat high with expectation. He had hoped that Helen would have written a few lines, or sent some message, but in this he was dis-

appointed. There was a reference to "my daughter's gratitude," but nothing more, and the young man's heart grew slightly bitter. Still, he should surely see her again, and he felt certain that she would be interested in him.

He was very weak when she came, and while he had escaped much that the doctor feared, the wound in his head was a bad one, and great care had to be taken. He had been allowed to come down, however, and sit in a comfortable armchair in the cottage parlour, and while Dr. Hawke insisted on many precautions, he gave hope that in a few weeks he would be as well as ever.

It was with the doctor's consent that she paid this visit. Indeed, he had told her to go. She would do the patient good, he said; and while he did not let the Rosevears know that Helen Granville was coming, he saw to it that they should be ready to receive her when she came.

John Rosevear's cottage was superior to the ordinary miner's dwelling. It was well built, and surrounded by a neatly-kept garden. At the foot of the garden ran a rippling brook, by the side of which willow bushes grew, while at the back of the house grew several large sycamore trees. Two or three laburnum bushes had also been planted, which were now in the glory of their summer foliage, while an air of sweetness and rest pervaded the whole place.

Helen Granville noted all this as she entered the tiny gateway. She knew instinctively that she would meet with nothing coarse or repulsive, and without knowing why, she was more gratified than would ordinarily have been the case under such circumstances.

The cottage door stood open, and so the timid knock which she gave was easily heard by Mrs. Rosevear, who sat at the end of the kitchen table sewing.

"Yes, miss?" she said, politely, to her visitor.

"Does—Mr. Rosevear live here?" she asked.

"Yes, he do." Then the light of recognition flashed into her eyes. "You be Miss Granville, that do live up to Creekavose?" she said.

"Yes," replied Helen. "I came to see your son. I hope he is getting well."

"Merlin will be fine an' glad to see 'ee, miss; he will for sure. Will 'ee be plaised to go in the pa'lor, miss? He's in there."

She opened the door of the little room indicated, and Helen saw a tiny compartment, the floor of which was covered with cocoanut matting, and furnished modestly, but with taste. Everything, moreover, was spotlessly clean.

"Merlin, my dear, here es Miss Granville come to see 'ee. Be plaised to set down, miss," and Mrs. Rosevear placed a chair near the one on which Merlin sat.

"Pray don't try to rise," said Helen to Merlin. "I'm afraid I ought not to have called so soon, but I wanted so much to see you and thank you."

"It's very good of you to come, Miss Granville," replied Merlin, flushing. "I am glad you are well enough to be out."

"Oh, I got up the day after the — the — accident." She shuddered slightly. "The doctor says my nerves are very good," she added, with a little laugh.

To Merlin she seemed like an angel as she sat by his side. The light summer dress, so simply made, yet so perfectly fitting, revealed to the young man a girlish, graceful form, which to him was beautiful beyond compare, while the flash from her eyes and expression of interest on her face made his heart throb violently.

"I am so very glad you are getting better," she said; "it is good to think that——"

"Yes; every one was saved," he said, noticing her hesitation. Then, turning to his mother, he said, "Mother, I think Miss Granville would like a cup of tea after her walk."

Mrs. Rosevear, eager to do something which she regarded as within her province, hurried away, leaving Merlin and Helen alone.

CHAPTER V

MERLIN'S RESOLVE

FOR the first few minutes both Merlin and Helen felt somewhat reserved after Mrs. Rosevear had left the room. To the young man it was joy beyond measure to see the young girl sitting at his side. She, who seemed so very far away from him, had been brought near through that terrible accident. Yet how thankful he felt for it! The very joy of seeing her there seemed to seal his lips. To Helen Granville, on the other hand, the very novelty of the situation made it difficult for her to speak. She knew so little of cottage people, save as her father's dependents, and she was afraid lest by any unwitting word she should wound the feelings of him who, in saving her from death, had almost given his own life.

Presently her eyes rested on the little bookcase over his head, and instantly she found something to converse about; for her own favourite authors were represented there, besides books which revealed the fact that young Rosevear was interested in writers usually unknown in Cornish villages.

"You are fond of reading?" she said.

"Very," he replied.

"And writing too, I hear."

He flushed a little, and then said, "It has been the dream of my life to be able to write, but I am afraid my talents don't lie in that direction."

"Dr. Hawke tells me you possess a great deal of power. He thinks your stories very good indeed."

"Dr. Hawke is very kind, but unfortunately Dr. Hawke does not control the editors of the papers to whom I have sent my work. Evidently they think differently."

"Oh, every one is discouraged at first. Only a very few get a footing easily."

"So I've heard," he replied; "but 'hope deferred,' you know."

"Yes, I know what you mean; but still, you should hope on. You have such grand opportunities, too. Think what a world of romance there is associated with these Cornish mines. You must not give up hope."

"I do not mean to," he said, a bright light burning in his eyes. "I shall fight a long time before I give in. It is very kind of you to take such interest in me," he added.

"I cannot help taking an interest," she replied, simply, at the same time feeling that this was not what she intended to say at all. "Why"—and her voice trembled—"I owe my life to you. But for you I should——" She did not conclude the sentence, but looked out of the window towards the bottom of the garden where the willow bushes waved.

"Oh, I was glad, so glad to do what I did, and it was so little," he stammered. "I think I should have gone mad if—if I had been unsuccessful."

"I was terribly frightened when we came back to the level and found that you had gone," she said. "My heart reproached me all the time for leaving you, and yet I thought it was for the best. What led you to try and go back again?"

"When I awoke to consciousness," he replied, "I think my mind was partly unhinged. I only realised in part what had happened. I had an idea that you had gone back to

find your father, and I thought I heard you calling to me for help. I remember rushing back blindly through the darkness, calling out to you and telling you not to fear. Then when I came to the cross-cut I became more excited, for I hardly knew where I was. Then I struck my forehead against a sharp stone. After that I remembered no more."

"Oh, you were kind, you were brave!" she cried, in a girlish impulsive way.

"No, I am afraid I am a great coward," he said; "but would you mind saying no more about it, Miss Granville? It is very kind of you to——"

"I cannot help speaking, Mr. Rosevear. I am afraid I must seem very ungrateful to you, but indeed I am not. All your comrades and friends will tell of your bravery for many years to come."

"Oh, no; they will forget all about it, and about me, too, expect," he added, a little bitterly.

"How forget you?"

"I am going away."

"Going away?"

"Yes; I feel that I can't stay as the clerk of Besowsa any longer. I shall go to London."

"To London?"

"Yes; a kind of Dick Whittington over again. Not that I ever expect to be Lord Mayor of London; I would not if I could. I would rather see my name on the title-page of a volume of poems or of a successful novel than be a Prime Minister. I would rather be the friend of such a man as Thackeray, or Thomas Carlyle, than have a peerage." His eyes flashed as he spoke, and in spite of the bandage on his brow, and the pallor which rested on his face as the result of his illness, Helen Granville could not help feeling what a fine appearance he had.

"But why to London?" she asked.

"Because there is no hope for me here," and he looked at her yearningly; "because I might stay here for ever, and never have a chance to be or to do anything, and because London is *the* place of the world."

"Is it nothing, then, to do what you did a week ago?"

"A dog would do so much if it had reasoning power," he said, a little bitterly; "that is, if the dog loved. What I mean is that I can *do* nothing; and be nothing. I cannot have a position in society, I cannot meet as an equal those whom the world admires."

"Is it nothing to be a hero, then?"

"A miner can never be regarded as a hero—that is, while he remains a miner. A miner is regarded as for ever outside the gate of the cultured, the refined. I might be a scholar, a poet, a romancer; but if I remained a miner, there would be no chance for me."

"But how do you know you would succeed in London?" she asked, quietly.

"Because others have—others who have no better brains than I. Besides, this morning——"

He did not finish the sentence, for his mother at that moment came in and laid a snowy table-cloth on the little table, on which she placed a delicious plate of bread-and-butter and a loaf of saffron cake.

"I be fine and proud to 'ave 'ee 'ere miss," said Mrs. Rosevear. "I never thought I should be 'onoured by seein' Squire Granville's daughter drinkin' tay at my house;" and the simple soul flushed with pleasure.

A spasm of pain crossed Merlin's face. What must Miss Granville think of his mother? There seemed such a tremendous gulf between them. The young girl, so refined, so cultured, and accustomed to meet with the best families in the county, must surely scorn the simple cottager. Nay, she would not do that, but she must feel towards her as she

did towards any working man's wife. She must know that they were as far removed as the poles. And yet such was not the case. Mrs. Rosevear was a simple cottager, it is true, proud that Helen Granville should sit at her table, and artless enough to tell her so. But she was one of Nature's ladies for all that. Her soul was pure and honest, and Helen felt it as she sat down by her side.

"I s'poase you and Merlin have bin talkin' 'bout books," she said, proudly. "Merlin was always a great one for books. I ded hope when I seed how much he liked raidin' that he would be a praicher, and p'raps become an itenerant; but he would never take to it. I hope he'll come to that now. It's the highest callin' in the world, miss; do'ant you think so?"

"There's nothing higher than to try and lead those around us to higher and truer thoughts," she replied, "and there are many ways of doing that."

Merlin looked at her gratefully, and then the conversation drifted into other channels.

When Helen left the cottage shortly after it seemed to the young man as though he were left in darkness. Her presence had made the little room like a palace; the air seemed sweeter to breathe while she was there. Oh, if he could only win her! If she would only link her life to his what an inspiration he would have! To work for her! To have her near him helping and cheering him! And why shouldn't he? He knew he was equal in many respects to those who would be regarded as worthy to win her hand. What of George Newlyn, Squire Newlyn's son and heir? He, Merlin Rosevear, was more than his equal in brains, and in education, too, for that matter. But he was poor; he was a cottager; his father was a miner, and he himself had for years worked underground. But what of that? Let him get outside the little life of this mining village; let him go

to London, where ability was always welcomed; let him carve out a position for himself; let the papers be filled with his name—then all would be changed.

He remembered his talk with the young artist from London who had called to see him that very morning, and who had told him stories of youths coming to London penniless and unknown, and yet who had, by their genius and dogged perseverance, lifted themselves to high pedestals of fame. And he would do it, too! Then he could go to Helen Granville proudly and offer everything to her.

Hundreds of young fellows have dreamed in that way, and have either died dreaming or become hardened and embittered because of disappointment. Merlin looked upon his going to London as his great opportunity; once there, he was sure he could get some one of position to recognise his abilities; and the fact that many London editors had already refused his work did not dispel the rosy light in which London appeared to him. But what of the meantime? Would not Helen Granville be wooed and won while he was struggling from obscurity to fame? The thought was bitter beyond words. To see her the wife of another would drive him mad. But what could he do?

Then a great resolve entered the young man's heart. He nursed it all through the evening; he dreamed about it after he had gone to bed; it inspired him when he awoke the following morning.

Two days later he was out among the hills. His resolution had seemed to have hastened his recovery, and the steady light in his eyes revealed the fact that he would not falter in his decision. He wandered towards the seashore, for Merlin loved the sea; it always inspired him, as I think it must inspire all whose hearts and lives are above what they shall eat and what they shall drink.

He had walked but a little way along the shore when he

saw his visitor of the Saturday morning before, who was also the young man whom Helen Granville had seen sitting by his easel looking out on the blue waters.

"Ah, Rosevear," said the artist, pleasantly; "glad to see that you are recovering so rapidly. But don't overdo it, my dear fellow."

"The open air is doing me good," replied Merlin; "besides, I wanted to see you. I knew I should find you here, and I wanted to talk with you about London."

"Hang London!" replied the artist; "this is a million times better than London. I wish I hadn't to go back so soon."

"Have you to leave here soon, then, Mr. Gregory?"

"I have, worse luck; still, I've had a jolly time—a right jolly time. I think I've done a good bit of work, too. I'm proud of that, for as a rule, I'm afraid I'm a lazy beggar."

He spoke in a frank, sunny way. Evidently there was nothing sullen or morose about him. He took life easily, too, and to all appearance did not trouble much about its dark problems. And yet no one could look into his eyes without realising that behind the seeming carelessness was a great earnestness, a great love for reality.

"And when do you go, Mr. Gregory?"

"On Friday, I expect. I've promised to meet a gentleman on Saturday morning. Bother him! I wish he had stayed at Timbuctoo or some other place. Still—— Oh, by the way, Rosevear, I read those things of yours last night."

"Yes?" said Merlin, eagerly; "it was very kind of you to look at them."

"Not at all, my dear fellow. You see, my landlady had cracked you up so that I couldn't help asking you to let me see them."

"Your landlady being my aunt is naturally very partial," replied Merlin.

"Very likely," replied the other; "but, honestly, you ought to make something out—in time."

"I'm glad you think so."

"But mind, no editor, no publisher would accept your work in its present condition."

"Would you mind explaining?"

"You want my candid opinion?"

"I shall be very glad of it."

"Very well, then; I'll begin with the favourable side first. You have great power as a story-teller; in a certain sense you are what is called a born story-teller. You have a vivid, wild imagination. You can invent plot, intrigue, without trouble. You catch the spirit of the scenes you write about."

"Thank you," said Merlin, fervently.

"But there is another side to the shield," went on the artist; "you write execrably."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing about your penmanship—that's all right. I mean your diction, your method of constructing your sentences. Not that they are often ungrammatical; but they are clumsy, laboured, involved, unworkmanlike. There is nothing crisp in your way of putting things—nothing striking. Any ordinary editor reading your stories would say, 'The fellow has a story, but he does not know how to tell it'; your awkward way of saying things would set any literary man's teeth on edge."

"That can be—*shall* be improved," said Merlin through his teeth.

"Of course it can be improved. The truth is, your lack of education, or rather your lack of training, is always appearing. You possess a great deal of miscellaneous information, and you have read a number of books—that is apparent. But you have read those books carelessly."

"No," said Merlin.

"Yes, you have," replied the artist; "for example, you have not read 'The Vicar of Wakefield' carefully."

"I can tell you every detail of the plot," responded Merlin.

"I have not the slightest doubt about it, but you have read the book for the story, and not for the splendid English in which it is written. If you had read Goldsmith at the rate of a page a day, and become thoroughly imbued with his chaste writing, you would not have turned out such sloppy work as I have just been reading."

Merlin was silent.

"Here's an example of what I mean," continued the artist; "look at these two pictures of mine. Do you see the difference in them?"

"Yes; the one is finished, the other is not."

"And do you think any lover of pictures would buy the unfinished one?"

"No, I should think not."

"Certainly not; and yet one is, broadly speaking, as faithful a representation of the scene it is intended to portray as the other. The general contour of the features is true enough in the picture which you confess no one would buy. It simply lacks finish. Your stories are like that. The main outlines are very well done, the plots are good, but your methods of presenting them are abominable. There is no *finesse* in your work. You throw your words in with a pitchfork, you put on your paint with a trowel. You see, Merlin, my lad"—and the artist became familiar—"more depends in many cases in the way in which a truth is put than in the truth itself. You see what I mean?"

"I think I see. You mean that my style is bad."

"That's just what I mean. But the word *style* has been so bandied about in literary circles that I hate using it.

Still, it expresses the truth. Your style is worse than bad; it is simply detestable."

"You put it strongly."

"Just because so much depends on it. In the past you have worked at your stories—that was right; but you must work at your sentences, too. Learn to write with clearness and precision, and then a fellow with your temperament is bound to write with force."

"Yes," said Merlin, and a look of determination shone in his eyes.

"Then there's something else," went on Gregory. "Your work fails from a journalistic standpoint."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This. A journalist knows that unless he catches the reader's attention at the onset the probabilities are his work will not be read at all. He must not waste his time in uninteresting preambles. He must strike straight home at once. Do you see?"

"Yes."

"Very well. In one short story of about three thousand words you devote the first five hundred in describing a place which no one cares anything about. If you want to give descriptions of places and things, give them after you have first gained your reader's attention and sympathy. In novels people are interested in men and women, not in pansies and tulips and meadows and sighing breezes and sunsets. Mind you, very often a description of all this is necessary, but not until a strong personal interest is aroused."

"You seem to know a great deal about literature," said Merlin; "I wonder you don't write yourself."

"Oh, I've done most things," laughed the other. "I'm afraid I shall never do much, but it hasn't been for want of trying."

"But have you ever had anything accepted?"

"Oh, yes. Here's some things which came by this morning's post." He handed Merlin a bundle of papers, which the young man eagerly seized.

"'A Legend of Pengargle Cove, by Vivian Gregory,'" he read. "Ay, and here's something marked with a blue pencil, 'When Shadows Depart: A Novel, by Vivian Gregory.' Why, it's a review, and a favourable one, too. You have written two other books, I see, and yet I never heard of you."

"And do you think, my lad, that every man who writes a book becomes known? There are too many scribblers for that. No, no; it's only one writer in a thousand that the world ever hears anything about."

For some months from that time Merlin Rosevear regarded Vivian Gregory with reverence. A man who had written a book was to him an object of peculiar interest. Ignorant as he was of the shoals of books which are spawned from publishing houses, a living writer was to him a wonderful phenomenon, and he watched him eagerly as he worked away at his picture, and longed more than ever for the friendship of such a man.

"Do you think," said Merlin at length, "that there would be any chance for me if I went to London?"

Vivian Gregory waited for some seconds before he replied. Evidently he was reckoning up the traits and characteristics of his questioner.

"I think it might do you good, anyhow," he said; "and if you have pluck and perseverance, if you are willing to starve for a year or two, you may get a footing. But if you expect immediate success, if you expect a bed of roses, and all that kind of thing, for heaven's sake stay at home! There are scores of geniuses at this hour starving in London garrets. Still, you have a father and mother, and could come home if you failed. But why not toil on here, and get a footing before going to London?"

"Because I can't," replied Merlin, "because I feel stifled here."

"Stifled with a sea and sky like this!" said the other. "But I must be off. A friend is coming to stay with me until Friday, and I have promised to meet him."

Vivian Gregory hurried up the cliff pathway, and was soon lost to sight; and then Merlin's thoughts were turned into other channels, for coming down another pathway towards the beach he saw Helen Granville.

CHAPTER VI

MR. GRANVILLE'S OFFER

MERLIN, with fast-beating heart, hastened towards the woman he loved, who, when she saw him, held out her hand.

"I am so glad you are better," she said.

"Oh, yes; I'm getting quite strong. In a few days I shall be as well as ever."

"Have you received my father's letter?"

"No, Miss Granville, I have received no letter."

"Then the messenger must have delayed it, I suppose. It should have been at your house hours ago."

"I have been out a good while, Miss Granville; perhaps that is why I have not seen it. There is nothing wrong, I hope."

"Oh, no. My father wants to see you, that is all. He is too weak to get out, that is why he wrote."

"He is not seriously ill, I hope?"

"No; only his nerves have been much shaken and he cannot bear fatigue."

Merlin scarcely thought of the reason for which Mr. Granville might wish to see him. He was too happy. To be by this young girl's side was gladness itself. Neither did he feel as though they were strangers. The fact that he had carried her in his arms somehow drew them together. Although the thought did not define itself in his

mind, the fact that they had been alone together in the dark mine, and that he was now suffering because of his efforts to save her, did not allow him to think of her as a stranger.

"I have been talking with a young artist from London," he went on presently. "We have been chatting about literary work. I have been asking him about the advisability of my going to London."

"An artist would not be able to give you much information about literary matters, would he?"

"Oh, he's a literary man as well. He has written books. He showed me a review of one just now."

"What was the name of the book?" she asked.

"'When Shadows Depart.'"

"'When Shadows Depart'! Is Vivian Gregory here, then?"

"The name of the artist is Vivian Gregory," replied Merlin, a pang akin to jealousy shooting through his heart. "Do you know him?"

"Only by name. I have read two of his books."

"And you like them?"

"Yes, they are pretty. Is he staying here?" she asked, with interest.

"Until Friday," replied Merlin. "He came down here for sketching purposes."

"And he advises you to go to London?"

"Scarcely. He thinks if I am prepared to rough it there is a chance for me. And I *am* prepared to do that. I am prepared to do anything to get a footing."

"But would it not be best to get the footing while you are here? Good work is sure to tell in time. Then when you go to London you would not go unknown."

He was silent for a few seconds, not daring to tell her what was in his heart.

"Would you mind letting me see some of your work?" she asked presently.

"If you would care," he replied. "But I am almost ashamed to let you see it. Mr. Gregory has made me feel so ashamed of it."

"How is that?"

Merlin told her what he had said.

"I am more eager than ever to see it," she responded.

"Then nothing will give me greater pleasure, Miss Granville. If *you* can find any merit in any work of mine I shall be happy."

For a second her face flushed, but whether it was because of anger or pleasure it would be difficult to tell.

"You have made up your mind to go to London, I think you said?" she remarked presently.

"I—I think so. There can be no hope for me here—none!" he replied, bitterly.

"That is the wrong spirit, Mr. Rosevear. But you look pale and weak. Should you not go home and rest?"

"Thank you, Miss Granville, I will go," he replied. "Good afternoon."

He walked away with an aching head and a sad heart.

"How can there be any hope for me?" he said, as he wended his way towards his father's cottage. "She would not notice such as me but for the fact that I saved her life. I am a cottager, a miner, a plebeian. And yet I will win her, I will make her love me. I will, I will!"

"Good afternoon, Rosevear. I am glad you are getting better."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Newlyn. Yes, I am nearly well."

"That's right. By Jove, it was lucky you thought of that old level, and plucky to venture along it. There might have been winzes and pitfalls of all sorts. You must

have been level-headed, too. Have you seen the account in *The West Briton?*"

"No, I've not seen it."

"Then you ought. Here it is. 'Heroism of a Cornish Miner. Rescue of Fortescue Granville, Esq., and his daughter.' Why, it's in everybody's mouth. My father says he would like you to come up some night and tell him about it. You were fortunate in saving such valuable lives, Rosevear. No doubt Mr. Granville will reward you handsomely. I'm going over to Creekavose now; I shall speak to him about it."

"No, Mr. Newlyn, you must not."

"Must not! Why?"

"Because I could not think of taking a reward."

"But why? Surely you have earned it."

"I could not think of taking it. Supposing you had done what I have done, would you take a reward?"

"Certainly not; but then I'm a—that is, I am not in your position."

"At least, I have feelings if I am not wealthy, Mr. Newlyn."

"Oh, very well. I will say nothing," said the young Squire, in a changed voice. "I congratulate you on your recovery; good afternoon."

Merlin turned and watched him as he rode away. Young Newlyn was a perfect horseman, and the miner's son could not help admiring him while he envied him.

"There is such a thing as training and refined associations after all," he said to himself. "And yet why am I not as good as he? I am taller by three inches and better developed. I have as good features, too, and better brains —I am sure I have. Place us both together in London, on equal terms, and I would outstrip him in any line of life. And yet he said he would speak to Mr. Granville about a

reward! A reward! And why not? There's not a man besides myself in Besowsa mine but would accept it. But I'll let them all know. I will, I will!"

He strode on forgetful of his weakness, and only dimly conscious that his head throbbed painfully.

"He's going to see her," he mused; "he will speak of me as a kind of village phenomenon; but as one who looks above his station, while I——"

"Merlin," said his mother as he entered the cottage, "here's a letter from Squire Granville. Open it quick, my dear booy, and lev us see what he've said."

Merlin took the letter, while John Rosevear, his father, looked proudly on.

"This es a honour, mother," he said, "two letters from the Squire and a visit from his daughter. Not but what Merlin do deserve it. What do a say, Merlin, my booy?"

"Read it," said Merlin, gloomily, as he threw the letter on the table.

John Rosevear took the letter in his hands, and then, having looked at the crest on the envelope, carefully put on his spectacles. He was a long time in spelling it out, but at length laid it down with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Ah, that's summin' like," he said, proudly.

"Raid it out, John," said Mrs. Rosevear, while Merlin stood by the cottage door looking across the garden.

"Merlin, my booy, you've made your fortin," said John to his son. "This is it, mother."

"DEAR ROSEVEAR,—I have been thinking since I wrote you some days ago how I could in some way recompense you for your bravery in rescuing us from the mine in which we were entombed. At last I hope I have fixed upon something which I think may be agreeable to you, and at the same time enable me to discharge, in some degree, the

debt of gratitude I owe you. My brother, who, as you may know, is a large landowner in the north of the county, tells me that his steward stands in need of a young man of intelligence and a fair education to assist him with his correspondence and many other little matters in connection with the estate. I, after making the necessary inquiries about you, have written, telling him of your conduct and reputed acquirements, and my brother is willing on my recommendation to give you a trial. The salary at first will not be large, but as the present steward is getting old there is no telling, if you are faithful and capable, what the future may do for you.

"Will you, therefore, come to Creekavose on Thursday evening, about six o'clock, when I shall be glad to give you any necessary information.—Yours sincerely,

"FORTESCUE GRANVILLE.

"Creekavose, July 15, 18—."

"Why, Merlin, my dear, 'tes wonderful," said Mrs. Rosevear.

"Nothin' to kip him from takin' the steward's place in time," remarked John. "Ah, Mary, we ded the right thing when we kipt Merlin to school after he'd passed the sixth standard."

"Why, he might become the steward of Lord Falmouth in time," cried Mary Rosevear, excitedly. "Merlin is so clever that he can learn anything, and make hisself fit for anything. Then he would have a pony and trap of his own, and take his place with the gentlemen farmers."

"Iss, so he may," said John; "not but what I'd a ruther seed our booy a travellin' praicher. However, that wadn't to be. Merlin, my son, this'll be better than scribbling silly verses and stories, waan't it?"

"No," said Merlin, moodily.

"Nonsense," replied his father; "I call it Providence, tha's what I call it. Well, I shall be proud to know that my son es Squire Granville's steward."

"He never will be," said Merlin.

"But surely——"

"What does that letter offer?" cried Merlin, bitterly. "Nothing but a clerkship. I should be at the beck and call of the steward. I should have to write his letters, and do disagreeable things which he does not care for."

"But the future, my booy!"

"The future!" cried Merlin. "What of that? Probably the steward may have a son of his own to manage the estate after he gives up, while I should have to remain the under-strapper, the poor fellow who must be treated kindly because I once rendered a member of the family a service. No, thank you."

"But you caan't say 'No,' my deear," said his mother, anxiously. "Squire Granville do expect you to take it."

"Evidently. He thinks I'm ready to jump eagerly at anything he may offer. But I'm not."

"You waan't take it?" cried his father.

"No."

"Then you'm a buffle-headed boobah, that's what you be," returned his father, testily.

"I may be."

"But what do 'ee main to do?"

"Go to London, and make my own way."

"What, by yer silly nonsense 'bout writin'?"

"Yes."

"Then you doan't desarve help, ef you'll throw away a chance like this."

"Perhaps not."

He went into the little parlour, and pulled from under the little home-made couch a writing-desk he had fashioned

with his own hands. It was roughly made, and was minus paint or varnish, but it was large enough to contain his manuscripts, and was convenient for purposes of writing. This he unlocked and took therefrom a bundle of papers, which he scanned eagerly. Poor fellow! what infinite labour all this had cost him. What hours he had spent penning these lines, what wakeful nights he had passed in working out his plots! Was it all to be in vain? Many, many had failed, but a few had succeeded. Would he ever succeed?

"I will do it! I will do it!" he repeated.

His mother came into the room. "Merlin, my dear," she said, "you mus'n't think your father hard. He's disappointed, my dear; so was I for the minnit. But we shall git ovver it. Stick to yer writin', my booy, ef you want to, and yer mother'll stick to 'ee. Bless 'ee, my darlin', but all we've said we do main in kindness."

She put her arm around her son's neck, and kissed him tenderly, while a tear fell from her face on to his.

"Thank you, mother," he said, returning the kiss. "I knew you would understand me in time; and, mother, I'll make myself a position better than any he can offer, a position higher than that of a country squire. I'll do it with my own brains and my own pen, and one day he'll be proud to——"

He stopped. His imagination was leading him to tell his secret.

"I believe you'll be a great man, my deear booy," responded his mother, proudly and affectionately; "but," and she looked at him anxiously, "I'd ruther you shud be a good man than a great one, my deear."

"I'll try and be both, mother," he said, confidently.

When his mother had left the room, he began to examine the bundle of MSS. which he had taken from his desk and to criticise them in the light of what Vivian Gregory had

said to him. This was the first time any one had taken the part of "candid friend" towards him, and while he felt like being offended at the plain words, he could not help seeing that his work lacked many things. Selecting two of what he regarded as his best poems, and one of the best stories, he placed them in an envelope and addressed them to Miss Helen Granville; then, taking a sheet of notepaper, he wrote the following:—

"SIR,—Allow me to express my gratitude for the kindly interest you take in me. I will do myself the honour, as suggested by you, of calling at Creekavose on Thursday evening, when I hope to be able to show you how greatly I appreciate your kindness in seeking to care for my future. Meanwhile, allow me to remain your obliged and obedient servant,

"MERLIN ROSEVEAR.

"Fortescue Granville, Esq."

This letter he placed in an envelope, and, having addressed it, took it to the village post-office. When he came back he lay in his little bedroom, planning and dreaming for the future.

Next morning at breakfast Mr. Granville threw Merlin's letter across the table to his daughter.

"Evidently, George Newlyn is right," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Helen, taking up the letter.

"His thoughts are evidently above his position," replied Mr. Granville. "This letter is suggestive of a man writing to his equal."

"It's not at all badly expressed," remarked Helen, quietly.

"It's too well expressed," said Mr. Granville, testily.

"It savours of the literary aspirant of whom George Newlyn spoke last night. Still, we must be civil to him; he saved our lives. I daresay Horace will be able to do something for him. I have not faith in these would-be village geniuses, however; and I hate these prigs who are not content with their proper station in life.

Helen said nothing; but after breakfast she took the packet which Merlin had sent her, into the garden, and read it eagerly. There were tears in her eyes when she had finished the story, and she seemed very thoughtful as she wended her way to the sea; and when she reached the beach she sat long on a great rock and looked wistfully across the broad expanse of blue waters.

On Thursday, at the time mentioned in Mr. Granville's letter, Merlin appeared at Creekavose. He was immediately shown into a little room designated "the study," where Mr. Granville received him distantly, but with a certain amount of courtesy.

"Pleased to see that you are punctual, Rosevear," he said. "Punctuality is essential to a young man who wishes to get on."

"Thank you. I hope I've not kept you waiting," replied Merlin.

"Oh, no. Well, when will you be ready to go?"

"I have not yet decided to——" Merlin hesitated, as though he were not settled as to the right words with which to finish the sentence.

"Oh, we haven't settled about the salary; oh, no. Well, I could not name a sum. You see, my brother's steward has not seen you yet, and—well, he does not quite realise your value. But my brother is a generous man, Rosevear, and I have no doubt you will be satisfied on that score."

"Excuse me, Mr. Granville, but I have not decided

to accept your kind offer. The truth is, I have other plans."

"What do I understand you to say?" said Mr. Granville. "You do not accept this offer?"

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, nevertheless," remarked Merlin, "and I trust you will see how sincerely I appreciate your kind interest in seeking to secure——"

"Oh, very well. I am sorry I have troubled you, but I did not know you had such prospects that you could afford to refuse this. I do not think I need to detain you longer. Good evening."

"I hope that you realise how deeply I——"

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Granville, ringing the bell. "Mary, show this young man out, will you. I think he is some relation of yours, is he not, Mary? You may take him into the kitchen and give him something to drink if you like."

Merlin strode out of the house in a rage. Without saying good evening to Mary, who would gladly have taken him into the kitchen, he hurried down the drive, then, altering his course, he jumped over a stile, and followed a footpath that led to the sea.

He had not gone more than a hundred yards before his heart stood still for a moment, and then beat loudly, sending the blood into his face. Two hundred yards along the path, where it threaded its way through a wood, was Helen Granville.

She held out her hand kindly to him as he came up.

"Have you been to Creekavose?" she asked.

"I have just come from there, Miss Granville."

"And are you going to my uncle's? You see I know the purpose of your visit."

"I have declined the honour your father would confer on me," he said, bitterly.

She detected the tone of his voice, and, knowing her father's disposition, understood its meaning. She knew what her father would say if his proposition were not eagerly accepted, and, remembering that she owed her life to Merlin, sought to be more cordial than she would otherwise have thought necessary.

"Of course you have other plans for the future?" she said, pleasantly.

"I think I shall go to London at once," he replied.

"I have read what you sent me," she said, "and have been more interested than I can say. Would it not be better for you to stay at home a little longer, and seek again to conquer London before you go there?"

"I will do *anything you* ask me," he replied, passionately, and watched while her cheeks became crimsoned.

CHAPTER VII

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

"FORGIVE me," cried Merlin, noticing the effect his words had made upon her, "I know I am mad to feel what I feel, or to say what I am going to say. Nevertheless, I must tell you what lies in my heart."

She did not speak, but the crimson forsook her face, leaving her paler than was her wont.

"Do you know why I started on what people have said since seemed one of the maddest ventures possible? Do you know why, when the miners said there was no hope for any of you, I tried to find you by means of that old level?"

Still she was silent.

"It was because when I met you that Saturday evening in the lane close to Creekavose Gate a new life entered me. From that time I have been mad, and yet the madness has been heaven to me."

A look flashed from her eyes which he did not understand.

"Yes, you are angry with me, Miss Granville," he went on; "naturally you are. I know my presumption is beyond words; that is, according to the ideas of the world. I know that I am a miner, working for weekly wage. But try and understand me if you can. For years I have had no associates save my books and my thoughts. I have lived a life

apart from the boys with whom I went to school. They have neither understood nor liked me, and I have not wanted them. The dream of my life has been to live another life than that of a miner. I wanted to succeed as a man of letters, and I longed for congenial society. That I have found nowhere save in the books I loved, and the men and women of books never ease the hunger of one's heart. Then I saw you, and the world became new. You were not like any one I had ever seen, and—and—well, since then I have lived only for you."

"Mr. Rosevear," said Helen, "you surely forget——"

"Yes, I know," went on Merlin, "I forget everything. I do not think I should have told you—yet, if you had not suggested that I should stay here instead of going to London. I will stay here; I will do anything, everything. My one idea in going to London is to make a position, so that it shall not seem incongruous for me to speak to you like this. I will do anything for you, anything. How can I help it? I love you better than my own life."

She saw he was earnest. His lips trembled, his hands were clenched, his face was pale, and his eyes gleamed with a strange light. An earnest man is never to be trifled with, and Helen Granville was not the girl who would trifle with any one. She owed her life to him too; but for his daring she would not be there to listen to his words. Besides, she was not one who thought so much of social position. Like all girls she had her dreams, and she had dreamed of one strong, daring, conquering difficulties—strong in mind, strong in body, and Merlin Rosevear came nearer her ideal than any one she had ever seen. She felt glad when he told her that he had declined her father's offer, and as he stood by her side, confident in his strength to conquer the difficulties before him, and withal possessing a face and figure that would please any woman, a strange feeling came

into her heart. And he loved her too. He had told her so in deeds as well as words.

"Will you not speak to me?" he asked, eagerly. "Will you not say something to ease the aching of my heart?"

"What would you have me say?" she said.

"Say!" he repeated. "I hardly dare tell you what I would have you say. I know it is madness for me to talk like this; but could you not give me hope? Could you not tell me that sometime, when I shall have bridged the gulf between us, that you will——?" He stammered, because he dared not tell what lay in his heart.

She turned as if she would walk back to her home, but Merlin stopped her.

"Nay, do not go yet, Miss Granville," he cried; "let us go down to the sea. You are not angry with me for speaking, are you? I—I could not help it."

"No; I am not angry, Mr. Rosevear," she said, "but I never thought of this. It is very strange."

"I know it is strange," he said, almost angrily. "I know it is wrong for a miner's son to speak to Helen Granville, as I have spoken. And yet why should it be? I love as truly as a man born in your station. I have—I know it seems like conceit to say so, but I have brains equal to—to those of the so-called gentry. What is young Newlyn better than I? Put us side by side with equal chances, and would he do more than I? He could not love a woman as I love you. He could not! And yet I—I—— Oh, Miss Granville, if you would only bid me hope, if you would only tell me that sometime—years hence, perhaps, but sometime when I had made myself worthy——." He hesitated, and then, a sob almost choking him, he said, huskily, "I do love you so!"

"Hark!" she said, and he thought he heard a tremor in her voice, "some one is calling me. I will think of what

you say; I cannot tell you anything now—I never dreamed of this!"

"But you are not angry with me?"

"No; not angry, besides—there, I must go. Good-night!

She held out her hand. He caught it eagerly, and covered it with kisses. "Good-night," he said, with a sob; "remember, although the poles may seem between us, my happiness, my life, are in your hands."

When Helen Granville was alone in her room that night she gave herself up to thinking over what Merlin had said to her, and in spite of his position and associations her heart went out to him. She was young and unsophisticated, and, as I before hinted, she was not greatly influenced by worldly considerations. In her eyes Merlin Rosevear became an unknown genius and a hero. The poems he had sent her, the story he had written, revealed to her a world of possibilities. They touched her heart; they told her that their writer's heart was fresh and pure. They were the work of a man whose name would be loved everywhere. What if he were poor? He was still miles above representatives of the county families that she knew. He was handsome, he was clever, he was a hero, he had offered his life to save hers—and he loved her! But what would her father say? At first, no doubt, he would be angry and scornful, but when Merlin had risen from obscurity, as he would surely rise, when he was praised everywhere, and *fêted* by literary clubs, all would be different. Not that she cared so much for these things herself; her heart went out to Merlin himself. But for her father's sake she was glad that the future must belong to such a man as her lover.

To her as she sat alone that summer night, Merlin was revealed to her as her ideal; he fulfilled the dream of her life. Besides, he had saved her from death.

Presently she faced another question. Supposing Merlin never rose to fame. Supposing he remained a clerk of Besowsa mine, or at best became an unknown scribbler, a member of that countless horde who shuffled on in darkness, a private in the vast corps of penny-a-liners, who lived and died in obscurity? It was a chilling thought; but her heart still remained warm, she loved him still. Would she then be willing to face poverty with him? Yes, she would. At one bound her heart leaped over difficulties, over conventionalities, over her father's anger, over everything. The tears came into her eyes.

"He said that his happiness, his life are in my hands," she said to herself, with a sob; "they are safe, Merlin, they are safe."

Yes, she was willing to sacrifice home, position, everything, for the joy of giving herself to the humble cottager. Doubtless she was inspired by a great hope that Merlin would rise to great heights—what true woman would not be under such circumstances? But shade or sunshine, poverty or wealth, obscurity or fame, she loved him and was willing to be his.

Although Merlin Rosevear did not know it, he had won a great treasure, a pure, noble maiden had given him her love, her life.

I wonder whether men realise the value of such a gift; I wonder whether they know in their hearts that everything compared with the pure love of a pure woman is as thistledown. Since the Son of God gave His life for the world, the sons of men have received no gift so great as the love of the woman who gives her all to the man who has won her. No doubt sham love makes men cynical; no doubt the world has grown weary of the deceitfulness of women, but the true love of a fresh young heart is still man's crown of glory.

Helen formed no plans for the future; she did not think of what the coming days would bring. Merlin loved her,

and her heart bounded with gladness at the thought. She was no longer her own, she belonged to another.

All through the night she tossed on a blissful sea of joy. She had entered into bondage, but her bondage was sweeter than liberty; she found joy in her sacrifice. She did not think of a means of letting him know her decisions; she should see him again, and he would tell her the same story, the story she longed to hear, and then she would give him her answer.

Days passed and she did not see Merlin. The truth was he had been frightened at his own temerity. He was afraid lest she should feel herself insulted. He had hoped, fondly hoped, that she would at least write him a friendly note telling him that she was not angry with him, and when no such note came his heart became heavy. He dared not go and see her, the presumption would be too great; and he chided himself for yielding to his madness. Still he hoped. Abiding by his father's wishes, he had gone back to the mine and fulfilled the duties of clerk as he had hitherto done, and in the evenings he worked at his books. He set himself to correct and improve his style of writing; he laboured to make himself worthy to occupy the position to which he aspired.

The days passed into weeks, and he neither spoke to Helen nor saw her, while the distance between them seemed to grow greater. He had heard of a great friendship springing up between Squire Newlyn and Mr. Granville, and rumour said that George Newlyn was often and gladly welcomed at Creekavose, and so his heart became bitter. But he worked on, and hoped on. Then there came a rift in the clouds. An editor of a magazine accepted a short poem from him, and spoke very kindly of his work. He knew it meant very little. He had read of men who for long years got one article in ten accepted, and then in old age had given up in

despair. Nevertheless, it strengthened his determination to go to London. There must be more chances in the metropolis than in a Cornish mining village. And yet how could he leave Helen Granville without a hope of winning her?

One evening, as he was returning home from the mine, or, to be more correct, as he went for a walk along the cliffs before returning home after his day's work, he met George Newlyn walking in the direction of Creekavose. The young squire coolly nodded to Merlin and passed on.

"Yes," thought the young man, "he can go up to the house boldly. He belongs to a county family; he can meet her as an equal. And yet he does not possess two ideas. Money and position count for everything; brains and pluck count for nothing."

He had just been reading a story which had become current about Thomas Carlyle, who, when writing "The French Revolution," used to walk of an afternoon in Hyde-park, and who, as he saw the crowds of fashionable people drive past him, would shake his stick at them and say, "There's not one of you can do what I am doing, and yet you revel in wealth, while I can scarce earn enough to buy bread and cheese."

"I expect he will be gladly received at Creekavose," thought Merlin, as he watched young Newlyn's retreating figure. "Perhaps he is going to tell her what I told her, and if he does, his words will be received differently from the way she received mine. And yet she was not angry with me. Of course not; she thinks because I rendered her a service she must treat me civilly, but as for caring for me in that way, it is out of the question. Even if it were possible for me to gain her affection, our relative positions would hinder her from making it possible that I should ever win her."

Merlin was not wrong when he imagined that George

Newlyn might be on his way to see Helen Granville. The truth was the young squire had determined to offer her his heart and his name. He had spoken to his father, who had, after careful consideration, given his consent.

"It is true," the old man said, "that Granville does not occupy the position he once did. He had no business, as a county gentleman, to engage in risky speculations, and thus sacrifice the estate he held; but I find that the girl will, on the death of her mother's sister, an old lady who can't live long, receive something very handsome. On the whole, my boy, I don't think you can do better. So go, and good luck to you."

So George went. First of all he had a conversation with Mr. Granville, which cheered him wonderfully. The Newlyn estate was large and valuable. The rent-roll reached a high figure, the family was of the highest respectability. George was a well-behaved young man, and would make a good husband. On the whole Mr. Granville thought Helen could scarcely be expected to "do better," so he sent George out into the garden to seek Helen with a genial laugh, and that young gentleman was in high spirits. He was not long in finding Helen, and he told his story in a straightforward, manly way.

Two days after it was rumoured through the parish of St. Endor, and of Newlyn, the adjoining parish, that the young squire and Miss Granville were engaged. Merlin first heard it at Besowsa mine, and he felt as though his heart had been crushed by a pair of icy hands.

"I know my answer now," he thought, as he trudged home. "Very likely she has told him of my madness, and they have laughed together concerning it. No," and he recoiled from the thought, "she could not do that; she is too true, too noble for that."

The next day was Sunday, and it was well for him that

such was the case, for he was incapable of doing his work. In the morning he went to the village chapel, but the preacher might have preached Buddhism, or the duty of suicide, for all he knew about it. Had the singers sung some ribald music-hall song he would not have known. His mind was torn by anguish—almost amounting to despair. In those days Merlin knew what it was to love. During the afternoon he tramped along the coast, and in the evening, after the villagers had returned from chapel, he made his way to the spot where, some time before, he had met Vivian Gregory the artist. He sat down at the foot of a huge rock, and looked across the waters towards the western horizon, where the sun, which was just setting, caused both sea and sky to be lit up with golden glory. But Merlin thought not of the sunset. It possessed no beauty for him. At another time all would have been different, but now his eyes were dull with a great sorrow; a blight had fallen on everything.

He did not know it, but Helen Granville was coming down a path which winded its way through a wooded dell close by. She did not see him; she did not think he was near. The sand was hard and smooth, and she made no noise as she drew nearer and nearer to the place where he sat.

Presently, however, she gave a start, for she caught sight of him as he lay against the seaweed-covered rock, looking with dull, heavy eyes across the vast expanse of waters. She could not help seeing, too, that he was thin and pale. His cheeks were drawn and haggard; he looked years older than when she last saw him. Her heart began to swell with a great pity.

He turned and saw her, and then leapt to his feet, while light sprang into his eyes, only to leave them dull and despairing as before. He lifted his hat mechanically.

"I hope you are well, Miss Granville," he stammered. "It's a fine evening, isn't it?"

"Yes; and you?" she returned; "I hope you are quite well and strong again."

"Thank you for saying so," he said, bitterly. "It is good of you to care—more than I ought to have expected."

"I do not quite understand you," she said.

"Yes, you do," he cried rudely, recklessly; "you cannot help understanding. Excuse me, but it is mockery to tell me you hope I am well, when——" He stopped.

"When what?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Granville; I forgot myself. I do not think I am well—I—I feel dazed. Still, you must know. Miss Granville, may I have the honour of congratulating you? I know I am taking a liberty, but perhaps you will forgive me. I shall soon be gone from here now—I hope you may be very happy. Good-night."

"Will you tell me what you mean, Mr. Rosevear?"

"Why should I?" he retorted, angrily. "Why should I add to my misery by repeating what you must know has blackened my whole life?"

"I do not know of any such thing?"

"I know I was mad to speak to you as I did," he said, passionately. "I know better than you, feel more keenly than you, the gulf that lies between us. But I told you the truth. And, after all, there is nothing wrong in an honest love. You know what you are to me, insane as I may be in lifting my eyes to you. Why, then, make me repeat the fact that you have promised yourself to another?"

"I have not promised myself to another."

"What?"

"I have told you the truth."

"You are not engaged to young Newlyn?"

"No."

His heart grew warm again; the light flashed from his eyes.

"But report says you are engaged."

"Report is wrong."

"But—but he—he asked you?" stammered Merlin.

She did not reply in words, but her eyes met his.

"Do—do you forgive my madness?" he said, huskily, but with a look of hope shining from his eyes.

"Was it madness?" she asked, coyly.

In a moment he broke down all barriers, overleaped all conventionalities. He caught her hand eagerly, and held it fast.

"You know I love you," he cried, passionately, "and you know who I am, what I am. I know I am asking you for that which, if you gave it me, would mean your sacrificing that which is very dear to you. But *will* you give me a little hope?"

"If I can give it I will," she replied.

"Oh, think!" cried the young fellow; "I know how mean it seems of me to ask, but it is life to me. It will mean your father's anger, it will mean——"

"I know all about it, Merlin," she said, with a laugh which was half a sob.

"Oh! and you——" He did not finish the sentence. Their eyes met again, and he entered into a great joy—a joy which is beyond all words, and rarely comes but once. Happy is that man with whom it can remain!

"God help me to be worthy of you!" he said, presently; "and I will try—oh, I have no fear now! I—I—oh, Helen, there was never such a night as this!"

When they parted long after, the sea no longer sang sad songs to Merlin, neither were the heavens black; his heart throbbed with a mighty joy, while his lips burned with the kiss of the maiden who had bidden him hope. After he



had reached his father's cottage he could not sleep, his gladness was too great. He had dreamed of fame and of wealth, but the joy which they could bring was as nothing to the joy of knowing he was beloved. Whatever the future might bring, he could never say he was ignorant of pure joy, a joy as great as the angels know.

All the night he hugged his joy to his heart and made plans for the future.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS FORTUNE

MERLIN ROSEVEAR remained four months longer as the clerk of Besowsa mine, and then determined to stay in Cornwall no longer. He had sent article after article, story after story, poem after poem to the London periodicals, and was nearly always disappointed. He was very happy in the thought of Helen's love, but he was eager to make a position, and he felt he could not make it while he remained in Cornwall. As yet no one but Mr. Granville knew of his engagement. Helen had expressed a willingness for it to be known, but her father had insisted on her silence, while Merlin also said he would rather wait until he had gained a footing in the world of letters before people should know that she had promised to be his wife.

To say that Helen suffered for her love would be to barely hint at the truth. Her father was furious, and dared her at her peril to let any one know of what he called her insane passion. He also forbade her to see Merlin, and he would not allow the young man on Creekavose grounds. He constantly taunted his daughter on her low plebeian tastes, and told her that she was a disgrace to her name.

But Helen remained true to her promise, and although she seldom saw the young mine clerk, she sent him messages of comfort, with assurances of her constant love. She believed in the man she had chosen, and nothing that her

father could promise or threaten turned her aside from her purpose.

"You will be proud to own him some day," she said to her father one morning, after he had upbraided her for her disobedience to his wishes. "I know he is poor and unknown now, I know his father and mother are cottagers, but he has more brains than fifty of such men as George Newlyn rolled into one. The time will come when Merlin Rosevear will be known in every home in England, while George Newlyn will still be the heavy-headed squire of the parish. Then you will see I have acted rightly."

"But if not," said Mr. Granville; "suppose he always remains a poor, unknown country bumpkin, what then?"

"I love him for what he is," she replied, "and I shall be true to him if he always remains poor."

When the day was fixed for Merlin to go to London, she asked her father that he might come to Creekavose on the evening before his departure, but Mr. Granville angrily refused. When that time came, however, he saw her preparing to go out. "Where are you going, Helen?" he said.

"I am going to say good-bye to Merlin; as I told you, he is going to London to-morrow."

"You shall not. My daughter shall not go out like any farm servant girl to see a miner."

"I asked you that he might come here," she said, "and you scornfully refused; now I am going to see him."

"But—but——"

"Father, I shall go!" she said, buttoning a thick winter jacket, and Mr. Granville, seeing the flash of her dark eyes, said no more, but repented that he had not taken a different course of action.

Helen made her way to the sea coast, where she and Merlin had met before. The scene differed from that of the

night on which they plighted their troth. Then the sinking sun lit up both sea and sky with a golden glow which was beyond words, while the waves playfully splashed against the rocks which studded the sands. To-night the winds moaned, the sky was dark and leaden, while the sea hurled itself in fury upon the rugged cliffs.

She found Merlin awaiting her.

"Do you think, Helen," he said, after awhile, "that there is any chance for me? Who am I, and what am I? Here I am thought to be a clever fellow, but when I get to London I shall be nobody."

"But you will make yourself somebody, Merlin," she said, bravely. "You will work and you will fight on, and in a few months you will be looked on as a rising man."

"I mean to try, Helen; ay, I will get on if I've got it in me to conquer the difficulties, but it will be a shame to keep you here in loneliness."

"And do you think I shall not rejoice in your success? Why, you will write and tell me all about yourself, and you will send me your articles and stories and poems as they appear. Then by and by you will send me press notices about yourself."

"Helen, I'm not worthy of you!" he cried, with a pang of self-reproach, "but I will try to be, Helen. Oh, my darling, if I ever am anything, if I rise above the level in which I was born, I shall owe it to you. I should give up now but for you. God bless you, my loved one."

She dashed away the tears which started to her eyes, and kept him from the knowledge that her heart ached, and that the sky of her life seemed black. For Helen feared the future. She feared the constant reproach of her father, feared lest Merlin's abilities should never be realised. Like any one in her position, she did not relish the idea of becoming the wife of a cottager; but she did not let him

know of her fears, she gave him no hint that she doubted his success. Through thick and thin she would remain by his side, and although all else left him she would not.

"I owe my life to you, Merlin," she said; "how can I help loving you?"

"But you do not love me because of that, Helen?" he cried; "you are not with me because I once helped you. It is for myself, isn't it?"

"It's because I can't help it, Merlin," she replied.

"May God make me worthy!" he cried, fervently.

"It is I who should pray that, if you are true to your calling," she said.

"Do you think it a noble calling?" he asked.

"There is none nobler," she replied; "it is such a great thing to play upon people's imaginations and sympathies and emotions. It is such a grand work to inspire the minds and hearts of men towards noble deeds. Oh, Merlin! you can do so much good."

"Ay, and I will, Helen, I will write only what is pure and true."

"And remember I shall always be thinking of you, Merlin."

"Always?"

"Always. And if at any time you want help in any way, you will not hesitate to tell me."

A little while later they parted, Merlin to go home and prepare for his journey, and Helen to pray for strength, both for herself and her lover. She held out bravely while they were together, never letting him know of the pain which gnawed at her heart, but when she reached her room her pent-up sorrow would no longer be controlled.

Hers was the love of a pure, true woman.

The next day Merlin started for London. He took with

him the savings of several years, a healthy brain and body, many high ideals, and the love of a noble woman. London was to him a city of wonders, a field for great enterprise. It was, moreover, a new world which he determined to conquer. London was the centre of civilised life; once let him make his influence felt there, and all that he desired would naturally follow. He knew nothing about the great city. A few of the villagers had been to London, and had told him their impressions concerning the life there, but they knew nothing which he desired to know. The price of carpenters' wages and the size of the shops were nothing to him. He determined to get lodgings somewhere near Fleet Street. It was there that editors, publishers, and literary men congregated, and it was there he would make his home. He would live cheaply and work hard; he would visit editors and publishers; and the future of his life should be great. Then when he had succeeded in winning his laurels he would go to Cornwall and claim his bride. He would place her in a better home than Creekavose; he would introduce her to better society than was to be found in the four parishes which joined St. Endor.

When the train arrived at Paddington he was confused with the noise and bustle. Every one was in a hurry, and no one knew him. The night was cold and dark, but the glaring lights of the station illumined the gloom.

"Luggage, sir?" said a porter.

A strange sense of desolation came over him, and he shook his head. The porter passed on to look after other passengers.

He took his well-filled portmanteau and trudged slowly down the station. Some people whom he slightly knew lived in London, and his mother had besought him to go and stay with them for a few days till he "got a nice clain lodge," but he had determined not to make himself known

to any of them. In coming to London he was turning over a new page in his life, and he did not want to associate with people who had known him as a miner. In London he would be simply Merlin Rosevear, without friends or relations, but with great literary expectations.

When he got outside the station, however, and saw the crowd of cabs and 'buses, he was confused. How could he make himself felt in such a city? How dare he go into that great unknown world alone?

London looked more forbidding than usual that night. The month was February, and the air was cold and clammy. But for the street lamps it would be impossible to find one's way about. Perhaps there is no place in the civilised portion of the globe that makes one feel a sense of utter desolation so much as London does. Especially is this true as it relates to those who are strangers to the city. Its very size has a depressing effect. There seems to be no end to its long stretches of dreary streets. To those who have won a position in London, to those who have become acquainted with its geography, and caught the spirit of its best life, there is no place in the world half so fascinating; but to the stranger, to the visitor without friends, it is like the home of loneliness and desolation.

Merlin, as I have said, had made up his mind to take up his abode somewhere near Fleet Street or the Strand, but he had no idea where it was, and he had as little idea how to get there. Still, it was only six o'clock in the evening when he arrived at Paddington Station, and he imagined that he should have plenty of time to obtain suitable apartments. He had a few pounds in his pockets, but he determined to be careful of them; he had been impressed before he came with the terrible condition of a man in London without money.

He had a vague idea that he might be able to walk

to Fleet Street, and inquire his way thither of passers-by. So, holding his bag firmly, he walked about a hundred yards. Paddington, as every Londoner knows, is by no means the busiest part of the metropolis—indeed, it is somewhat out of the way; but to Merlin the roar and rush was simply intolerable. He had never been to a big town before—indeed, he had never been out of Cornwall; and so, not knowing what else to do, he hurried back to the station again.

"What is my best and cheapest way of getting to Fleet Street?" he asked of a porter.

"You can taike a 'bus, the green one—that'll be three-p'nce—or you can go underground. I should go underground to-night. It'll be bloomin' cold in a 'bus."

"How do I go underground?" asked Merlin, not knowing what he meant.

"Go down that gangway, and you'll get to a ticket office. They'll tell you there. Get a ticket for—but which end of Fleet Street do you want to go?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you'd better book for the Temple; then you'll be just between Fleet Street and the Strand."

Merlin did as he was bid, and a few minutes later found himself on the Underground Railway. It seemed a terribly long journey to the Temple, and the idea of so many stations to be passed was bewildering. "Sloane Square," "Victoria," "St. James's Park," "Westminster Bridge," "Charing Cross"—ah, "The Temple"! There he was at last. He got out of the train and climbed up the steps, and then paused. On the one side he saw the river, close to which ran an endless procession of cabs; on the other was a narrow street leading up to another great thoroughfare.

"Carry yer bag, sir! carry yer bag!" shouted some boys.

Filled with the idea of the thievish instincts of London lads, he crossed the road and stood by the Embankment wall. Beneath him were the dark, muddy waters of the river. He was "alone—all, all alone," and for a moment a feeling of despair mastered him. What could he do in a place like London? Had he not better——

He set his teeth firmly and grasped his portmanteau more tightly. A policeman passed him.

"Which is my nearest way to Fleet Street?" he asked.

"Get across, and go up Arundel Street," he replied, pointing in that direction.

A minute later he found his way past the Arundel Hotel, and up the street into the Strand. An endless stream of cabs and 'buses passed on, while he stood helpless. Everywhere was a crowd of people, but none took notice of him, save to give him a passing glance. A painted, bedizened creature came up and spoke to him, but with a shudder he turned away. To whom should he look for assistance?

A man stopped to look in at the windows of a shop. Merlin went up and accosted him.

"Can you tell me where I am likely to get respectable lodgings?" he asked.

The man stared at him. Evidently he was a respectable young countryman, decently attired and well behaved.

"You'd stand a better chance in the suburbs," he replied. "Lodgings are curious things to get here, unless you go to an 'otel. Still, a policeman might tell ya."

A minute or two later a policeman passed him. He repeated his question.

"Lodgin's?" repeated the policeman, eyeing him keenly; "respectable lodgin's? Where do you come from?"

"I've come from Cornwall to-day."

"Ever been 'ere afore?"

"No."

"Ah! well, it's difficult. I s'pose you are not over-flush with the needful?"

"I want to go to a cheap place."

"You'd a' done better to ha' stayed up at Paddington, or got out at Victoria and tried at Pimlico, or took a 'bus an' gone over to Battersea."

"I want to get a place near Fleet Street or the Strand," said Merlin, remembering his purpose in coming to London.

"Well, I knows of a shop just behind the Globe Theatre. There's a Salvation Army captain who's got some rooms over a newspaper shop. That might suit you."

"All right," said Merlin; "will you tell me where it is?"

"I am just leaving my beat, so I'll go with you. I don't know as it'll suit you, but if you don't like it you can leave. Besides, it'll give you a chance to look out for another place."

"Thanks. Yes, that'll do."

He did not altogether like going among Salvation Army people; but still, as the policeman said, he could change if he did not like it.

The policeman led the way up past the Globe Theatre, where the blaze of gaslights lighted up the dark street, passed along two or three dark byways, and then knocked at a doorway by the side of a small paper-shop.

"Mrs. Blindy," said the policeman.

"Law, Mr. Larkins, is that you?"

"Yes. Here's a young man straight from Cornwall. He wants to get respectable lodgin's."

"You are sure he's respectable?" Whereupon Mrs. Blindy showed herself.

"It's an orful come-down for me to take lodgers, Mr. Larkins, and I ain't a-got no sympathy with 'Arry for leavin' a respectable sitooation to go a slummin'; but 'ee would,

and I've been brought down in the world. If 'ee's respectable, Mr. Larkins, he can hev one of the top rooms, or both on 'em."

"Oh, he's respectable enough. You can see for yourself."

Mrs. Blindy was a short, podgy woman, with a round, bullet head and muddy-looking skin. Her clothes were not very clean, neither was her hair very tidy. Merlin could not help comparing the dingy place with the trim little cottage he had left that morning, and as he did so a dull pain seemed to fasten on his heart.

"Can I see the rooms you have to let?" asked Merlin.

She led the way upstairs until they reached the garret, talking all the time about what she had been accustomed to, "afore 'Arry got converted an' took to slummin' for the Awmy." Arrived there, she held a badly smelling lamp so that he might see the apartments she wished to let.

"They are werry nice rooms, Mr. Larkins," she said to the policeman; "not, of course, like I was accustomed to afore 'Arry got converted and brought me down in the world, but still, werry clean and respectable."

"What would you expect me to pay for them?" asked Merlin.

"This room would be five shillin' a week, or, if you took 'em both, I'd let you hev 'em for nine—paid in advance, of course."

To Merlin this seemed a very large sum, and he was silent.

"Say four-and-six for this room, then," she continued, "and eight for the both."

"And furniture?" suggested Merlin.

"Oh, I can furnish one room right off. A chair-bed, carpet, washstand, table, and chairs. If you tike two, I should require the rooms took a month in edvance."

"I'll take one room," said Merlin. "I'll pay you in advance for a week—that is, if when I come back it is anything like decently furnished." He had become more confident by this time, and was able to make terms.

"Of course, you'll get your meals out, except your breakfast, and you must provide firin'. Eightpence a scuttle is wot I chawges for coal; kindlin' wood a penny a bundle."

"I'll get my dinners out," said Merlin; "but I shall want breakfast and tea at home."

"Well, I'll agree to that; but it'll be just a-gittin' the tea. There must be no cookin'."

"Very well; I should like tea in half an hour."

"Well, if you'll just edvance two shillin' for bread and butter and tea, I'll 'ave things beautiful by the time you come back."

Merlin went out into the street again, and after thanking the policeman, found his way along the Strand. He did not stay out beyond the half an hour. The roaring, rushing life oppressed him; it made him sick. Besides, he had eaten nothing since noon, and he was tired and faint. He passed on by the Gaiety Restaurant and Theatre, and saw the well-dressed, gay people who entered there; then he stood before the Lyceum, where crowds of people surged and struggled to gain a seat that they might hear and see England's most popular actor. Further on he saw an announcement of a play by a man whose name was familiar to him, and to see whose work a struggling mass of men and women, waited with their money in their hands.

And he had come to conquer this world; he had come determined to win fame and fortune. Well, he had taken the first step. He had taken a room for which he had agreed to pay four-and-sixpence a week, and he possessed pens, ink, writing-paper and—brains.

He went back and partook of a scanty meal in his dingy garret, and after sitting for a long time in silence, he laid down on the "chair-bed" which Mrs. Blindy had provided, and determined that on the morrow he would start to conquer London.

CHAPTER IX

CONQUERING LONDON

THE next morning Mrs. Blindy told Merlin a good deal of her experience, informed him as to the number of her children and of the state of her liver. Indeed, Merlin found before a week was over that the two subjects which Mrs. Blindy most delighted in were her prospects in life before "'Arry wur converted and went a-slummin' fur the Awmy," and the condition of her liver, the latter being in reserve when the other was exhausted. Having taken him into her confidence, however, and after telling him that two of her "gels was engiged to Awmy officers, and that the youngest and best-lookin' wasn't a-suited yit, she a-bein' so pertikler," she naturally expected that Merlin should return her courtesies, and was not a little disappointed that the young man did not satisfy her curiosity. She comforted herself, however, with the thought that when she had won his confidence "he'd be glad of a mothar," and so kept her temper.

After a breakfast of bread and rancid butter, the young man took a parcel of MSS. under his arm, and went out to interview publishers and editors. I will not try to detail his experiences. His story has been told time after time. It is true he favourably impressed some of the people whom he went to see, and they looked at his work with care. Some of them thought favourably of his writings, too, but

none of them saw fit to accept them. Merlin soon found out that every editor of position had a list of able writers on his staff, whose names were a guarantee that their work would be accepted by the public. Moreover, he discovered that an editor must find very exceptional merit in an unknown man before he would pay for his contributions.

During the first three months of his stay in London his success was hardly worth mentioning. He made the most of the two articles which were accepted, however, in his letters to Cornwall, and made his father and mother think he had acted wisely in leaving home.

At the end of six months he had scarcely advanced a step, while his money had vanished. I think he would have gone home at this time, if he possessed the wherewith to pay his railway fare, but he did not, and was too proud to write telling his friends that he had failed. For this reason, too, he had not told Helen Granville that he was destitute; rather he tried to impress upon her the fact that he had placed his foot on the ladder of fame, and would, if they were both patient, climb to the top. Helen wrote him long, cheerful letters, assuring him that she was constantly thinking about him, constantly praying for him, while her heart was filled with a great hope that he would succeed beyond his fondest expectations.

His money came to an end in the middle of July, and there seemed no probability of his getting more. He scrimped in his living all he could; he had bread-and-butter for beakfast, a fourpenny repast at a cheap vegetarian restaurant for dinner, and bread-and-butter for tea. He had, moreover, prevailed on Mrs. Blindy to reduce the price of his rooms to four shillings. When the last penny was gone he gave up hope. During the weary days of disappointment he had lost much of his glow of spirits, and began to bemoan his fate. He upbraided himself for having such

ambitious notions and for seeking the hand of such as Helen, and still he was too proud to let her know of the state of his finances.

"Let's see," said Mrs. Blindy one morning; "your rent was due yesterday week, Mr. Rosevear. I shall be glad ov it at once, if you please. 'Arry ev gived away *his* week's money, which is very 'awd fur me, who was brought up a lidy, and who ain't a-got no sympathy with sich things as slummin'. Ov course, 'Arry ain't like the common Salvation people; but, as I ses, it's very 'awd on me, who was brought up a lidy."

"Mrs. Blindy," said Merlin; "my last penny is gone. I hope to get some more in a day or two; but at present——"

"Then, Mr. Rosevear, you had better go at once. I knows you've paid me reg'lar, but I ain't a-goin' to spend my time a-tendin' you for nothink. I've cut down your rent to four shillin', and 'Arry says there's a young Awmy capting as'll be glad to 'ave yer room. I ain't a-goin' to be 'awd on you, so you ca' jist go out to-night, and I'll not chawge for the two days' rent."

When Mrs. Blindy had gone he sat down in despair. What could he do? Literature had failed him. During the months he had been in London he had earned only a few shillings. Once or twice he had tried to obtain money by manual labour, but he had been unsuccessful. He no longer looked stalwart and strong, as he did in the old days. He had a limp, washed-out appearance. His hands were white and thin, his face was haggard and careworn.

Had he possessed five shillings, aye, even a shilling, he would have invested it in papers, and tried to sell them at a profit. By this time he knew London well. He had penetrated its unknown places, and had ascertained how a vast number of people existed in the heart of the city. But hitherto he could not make up his mind to do as they had

done. What a blow it would be to Helen Granville to know that her lover occupied such a degrading position as that of selling penny wonders in the streets! That morning, however, he felt that he would do anything in order to earn enough to buy bread and pay for his lodgings.

He put on his hat and went into the Strand. A man passed by him who was burdened with a portmanteau. Perhaps he might be able to earn sixpence by carrying it. He opened his mouth to speak, but the words he wanted to utter would not come. He recognised the man as a farmer who lived close to his old home. This was the first person he had seen since he had come to London who hailed from St. Endor. Under other circumstances the sight of a familiar face would have given him joy; now it sent a feeling of pain through his heart, and he hurried as fast as he was able in the opposite direction. Still, the incident had started a plan in his mind. Could he not go to one of the great stations, and get a few shillings as a porter? His pride held him back, but a great hunger that was gnawing at the pit of his stomach sent him forward. He walked towards Liverpool-street. Faint and hungry as he was, he hurried as fast as he was able, although he had scarcely strength to enable him to get out of the way of a passing cab when crossing Ludgate Circus. Presently he came up to the square in front of St. Paul's Cathedral, and was just turning up the street past the shops, when, seeing the doors of the cathedral open, he entered the building and sat down. A few people knelt by the chairs which were placed close to the altar, others sat and listened to the rich mellow tones of the organ, while many walked up and down the great buildings and examined the monuments. Outside all was rush and roar and confusion, but here was rest. He sat down and listened while the music of the organ filled the great cathedral. In spite of himself he was rested, cheered. He

sat about a quarter of an hour, then he remembered that he was close to Paternoster Row, and that a month before he had left an article with the editor of a magazine, whose office was situated in this centre of the publishing world. Not that he expected anything from it. He had left articles in many an editor's sanctum, with but very little success. He wondered why he had not given up. Surely all the editors could not be mistaken; it must be that he had overestimated his powers, and he might as well give up all idea of winning the position for which he had so fondly hoped. But that meant so much. That meant giving up Helen Granville; it meant confessing himself to be a failure; it meant—— He dared not think of all it meant. No, he would struggle on; but oh! it was terrible to struggle on when starvation stared him in the face, and when that very day he had been ordered to leave the roof that covered him.

What, oh! what could he do?

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out Helen's last letter. It was full of helpful words, full of assurances of her continued love. The tears started to his eyes. "God bless her," he sobbed. "I should never have held up at all but for her."

In spite of himself his visit to St. Paul's had done him good. He did not believe much in religious services, and had attended no place of worship since he had come to London, but the atmosphere of the historic building had somehow helped him. He determined, too, that he would call on the editor with whom he had left his MS. It would be only a little out of his way in going to Liverpool Street Station.

The editor of *The Tribune* sent word to him that he was too busy to see him, and had not been able to examine his story. Would Mr. Rosevear let it stand over a day or two

longer, when he would communicate with him at the address written on his MS?

Merlin had difficulty in keeping back his tears as he came down the steps which led to the editor's room. He had not expected much, and yet every disappointment in his present state of mind made life darker.

It was now midday, and he had eaten nothing since the day before. His head became dizzy; he staggered, and would have fallen had not a hand upheld him.

"What's the matter?" said a cheery voice, with a Scotch accent. "Never say die, old chap!"

"I'm not very well," said Merlin, with an effort.

"You look dickey. Have you come from the editor of *The Tribune?*"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I've seen you in the Row with a parcel under your arm lots of times. I'm afraid you've had no success."

Merlin looked at the young fellow questioningly.

"Oh, I know all about it," continued the other, "and I said to myself time after time as I saw you, 'There's another poor beggar who wants to live by his pen and cannot.' Excuse me, old chap, but are you hard up?"

Merlin flushed painfully.

"I see how it is," laughed the other; "it isn't six months ago that I lived for two days on a red herring and a penny loaf. I'm not rich now; but come into this restaurant and we'll have some dinner."

"But—but, you——" stammered Merlin.

"Hang it, old man, I'm an embryo author too, and I know your sort. You'd rather starve than tell anybody you were short of the needful. You were brought up in the country, and don't know how to get on like Londoners."

He was a tall, gaunt young fellow, with high cheek-bones,

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freckled skin, sandy-coloured hair, and light blue eyes. By no means handsome, but he possessed a good, honest face for all that.

A few minutes later they sat at a small, round, iron-topped table, with a plate of hot meat and vegetables before each of them.

"Go in for a jolly good meal," said the Scotchman, "and when you've finished we'll have a talk, if you don't mind."

Both of them did justice to their food, after which Merlin's companion began to talk about himself. He evidently took this course, not because he wanted to be the subject of the conversation, but because he wanted to make Merlin feel at ease.

"I'm a Scotchman," he said; "my home is a few miles from Ardrossan. My father has a little farm there, a poor stony affair, from which he finds a difficulty to scrape a living. By the way, have you read Carlyle's career?"

"Yes," replied Merlin.

"My case is a sort of small edition of his. My father wanted me to be a scholar, if not a minister, and I got an entrance into Glasgow University, and kept there in just the same way as scores of other poor Scotch lads. When I'd taken my degree, I got a tutorship, but that I couldn't stand; and, having a taste for journalism, I wrote to a chap whom I knew, and who edits a paper in London, and asked him to accept an article of mine. Strange to say, he did, whereon I, elated beyond measure, came up here, determined to get my living as a knight of the pen. I've had a terrible pull, and I'm hardly through the wood, but I begin to see the light."

"I'm in the wood," said Merlin, "and I can't see my way out."

"And yet you ought. You seem a clear-headed chap. What have you been doing?"

Merlin told him.

"And you've been spending your strength on short things altogether?"

"Yes."

"Have you written a long novel yet?"

"No."

"I'm not sure that isn't a mistake. I'll tell you why. Publishers are glad to get good stuff from anybody, it matters not who. Editors like to get hold of big names."

"I see; but that doesn't apply to the newspapers."

"No; but nearly all the newspapers who pay their contributors have a regular staff. Besides, excuse me, but have you had a newspaper training in any way?"

"No."

"Do you write shorthand?"

"No."

"Have you practised condensing reports of meetings?"

"No."

"Ah! well that explains a lot. Well, I must be going now. I've an appointment at half-past one. You'll let me lend you five bob, won't you?"

"Really," said Merlin, "you've already paid for my dinner, and——"

"Oh, you'll pay me back again. The Scotch side of my brain has been summing you up, with the result that I know I'm making a good investment. This is where I hang out," and he gave Merlin his card. "Don't be afraid to look me up if you have an hour to spare any time."

Merlin read the card: "Fergus MacFarlane, 32, Onley Street, Bloomsbury."

"Let's see; what's your name, and where are your diggings?"

Merlin told him.

"Very well; if you don't look me up I shall be on your track. Good-day, and keep your pecker up."

"Providence!" exclaimed Merlin, when he had left. "If ever a man belied his looks and his nationality it is he."

The dinner and the five shillings made him feel a new man, and instead of going towards Liverpool Street he went back to his lodgings. MacFarlane had set him thinking. During the months he had been in London his one idea had been to earn ready money; that had evidently been the wrong course. He would work at the novel he had begun in Cornwall. Perhaps—perhaps—— He hurried down Ludgate Hill and along Fleet Street.

When he entered his lodgings he found two letters and a parcel awaiting him. One of the letters was from Helen Granville. By the time he had finished it he was crying like a child. Never until now did he realise her love, her sacrifice, her nobility. The letter seemed to come like cool, pure, healing air, helping and strengthening him.

"I am afraid you are not succeeding as you hoped, Merlin," she wrote. "Never mind; the brighter days are surely coming. Never did my heart tell me as now that you will overcome all your difficulties. The great men of London will soon know that you are their equal, if not their superior, and then they will eagerly seek you and your work. I am always thinking about you, Merlin, always making plans for us both, always praying for you, always loving you.

"Father is as little reconciled to my choice as ever; but I cannot help his anger. Rich or poor, famous or obscure, I am yours, Merlin. I believe in you, my own."

"Yes, I can write now," he cried. "I can write that novel. I see—I see! It's like light from heaven." Helen's letter had inspired him. The drama which he had

long wished to place on paper spread out before the eye of his imagination in rich, glowing colours!

He read her letter again; he drank in her words of cheer, and then, without looking at his other communications, he sat down, and for some minutes wrote rapidly. When he rose from the table he had completed a rough outline of a novel.

The other letter bore the same postmark, but was in an unknown handwriting, although he thought he detected something familiar about it. On breaking the seal he discovered a postal order, and a slip of paper on which were written the words, "*As an encouragement to hope on.*"

"This must surely be from either father or mother," he thought, "and yet it is not like them to send money in this way; besides, the parcel is from them."

On opening the parcel he found expressions of a thoughtful mother's tender care—two pairs of stockings, a tin of Cornish cream, and a huge pasty. He found a letter, too, containing many motherly inquiries:

"Are you short of money, Merlin, my dear?" the letter ran. "If you are let me know, and I will send you a few shillings. I have not sent you any because I was sure you would let me know if you wanted it. Still, living and lodge is dear in London, and money may be scarce yet. Don't be afraid to ask, my dear boy."

"This money can't be from home," mused the young man. "Who can have sent it, then?"

He examined the writing again, and the tears gathered in his eyes. "It's from her," he cried, "and she has sent it in this way because she was afraid of wounding my pride. God bless my Helen!"

A few minutes later he had paid Mrs. Blindy for another week's rent, and that lady had expressed the hope that Mr.

Rosevear "wouldn't mind what she said, as it was very 'awd for her, who was brought up as a lidy, to be short of ready money, because 'Arry 'ad a-joined the Awmy, and spent his money in slummin'."

That night he wrote the introductory chapter of his novel, and felt that at last he had begun to do something that would give him a footing in the world of letters. "It is Helen who has done it," he mused; "her letter has inspired me."

The great question now was to obtain means of livelihood while he finished his novel. He calculated how long he could live on the money he now possessed, and the chances he had of receiving more. There were half-a-dozen stories and articles under consideration by the editors of various papers.

One or more of these might be accepted and paid for, or perhaps they might all be refused. Still, he calculated he had enough to exist for three weeks after paying MacFarlane his loan of five shillings.

This was how he reckoned it up:—

	£	s.	d.
Cash in hand, including MacFarlane's Loan ...	1	5	0
To be paid to MacFarlane		5	0
Three weeks' rent to Mrs. Blindy ...		12	0
Three weeks' food		7	0
For washing, paper, ink, &c.		1	0
	£1	5	0

But could he manage to live for three weeks on seven shillings? Anyhow, he could try, and it was possible that some of his work might be accepted, or perhaps something would turn up. Anyhow, he determined to devote the next twenty-one days to writing his novel.

At the end of three weeks his money was gone, he had lost several pounds of flesh, he was as pale as a ghost, and he had written three hundred odd pages of his novel. Reckoning each page to contain two hundred words, he calculated that he had written over sixty thousand words. How he had managed to exist was a miracle; but although he was weak and ill, he had so far survived the ordeal. He was alive, he was free from debt, but he was penniless. What to do he did not know. He had received letters from Helen which helped him more than he could say, but no further *deus ex machina* appeared in the shape of a further postal order. He was too proud to ask Mrs. Blindy to trust him, too proud to write to Helen for help—indeed, he did not possess enough money to buy a postage stamp.

He tried to forget his poverty and hunger in work; but by and by he had to give up. He took his last crust of bread, and washed it down with a cup of water; then he walked out into the Strand.

The same rushing tide of life swept by. The roar of the great city sounded in his ears—the city he had come to conquer. So far he had failed; but, faint and penniless as he was, he determined to be victor even yet. He was sure that the novel he was writing would be accepted—when finished; but should he be able to finish it?

He turned down Fleet Street and walked on until he came to a restaurant where he was told literary men congregated. He looked in at the open door; then a great darkness seemed to arise up before him. But in the midst of the darkness was a face, a face that he recognised.

Then the darkness passed away and the objects around him became clear again. He felt some one grasping his hand, and heard a cheery voice saying, "Merlin Rosevear, can this be you?"

It was Vivian Gregory who spoke to him.

CHAPTER X

SUSPENSE

"EXCUSE me, my dear fellow," said Gregory, "but you look ill. Have you had lunch? Come and have some with me."

Merlin made no demur. He had scarcely enough strength to speak; he staggered on behind his friend until they reached an unoccupied table in the corner of the room.

"And how long have you been in London?" asked Gregory.

"Six months."

"Well?"

"I'm afraid it hasn't been well. I've had no success so far that is worth speaking about."

"H'm. Well, I'm afraid you've done a wrong thing in coming to London. You ought to have stayed in Cornwall until you had made your way."

Merlin was silent.

"Well, tell me about yourself. Where do you live, what have you done, and what are you doing?"

Little by little the truth leaked out—his struggles, his failures, his hopes of his novel, his poverty.

Gregory looked thoughtful. "Come," he said at length, "we can't talk here; let's go to my diggings."

Fleet Street did not look so dingy or forbidding to Merlin now that he had a friend by his side. He felt like standing upright again, and facing the world fearlessly.

Vivian Gregory hailed a passing cab, and the two got in. "Ventnor Street, Chelsea," he said; the cabby touched his horse, and Merlin lay back with a sigh of content.

Ventnor Street was a rather dingy-looking place of abode, which ran at a tangent from Queen's Road. The house in which Gregory lived, however, looked tolerably comfortable. Merlin heard a scuffling noise in the passage as his friend placed his latchkey in the door, and when they entered his working-room Gregory gave vent to some unparliamentary language.

"You are in diggings you say, Rosevear?"

"I have one room."

"Are there any 'daughters' in your house?"

"Yes; there are three. Two of them, however, are seldom at home. They are Salvationists, and, as Mrs. Blindy says, are 'in the Awmy, and engiged to Awmy captings."

"And the other?"

"She lives at home."

"Does she invade your territory?"

"She did at first. She made eyes at me, too. But after awhile she made up her mind that I wasn't worth troubling about. At least, I suppose she did, for lately she never comes into the room."

"There are two 'daughters' here," said Gregory, with a laugh, "and nothing is sacred to them. I pay for the exclusive rights of these rooms, and yet I can never leave without their being here. I have to lock up every drawer; if I didn't my letters would all be read. They know exactly what time I come in and what time I go out. They will know all about you by this time. Ah! here are some of

their belongings," and he picked up a pair of stockings which sadly wanted attention.

"All my books and papers are overhauled," he went on; "if I get a new novel, and don't read it immediately, I never get a chance of seeing it until they have devoured it."

"Well, you can get out of it," said Merlin.

"I'm too lazy, and too much of a coward," said Gregory.

"Too much of a coward?"

"Yes. I am afraid of the old woman's tongue. Man alive, you don't know what a landlady can do for you. But never mind that; let's talk about your affairs."

"They are not worth talking about, Mr. Gregory."

"Look here, drop the 'Mister.' How are things going on down in Cornwall?"

Merlin gave an evasive reply.

"By the way," said Gregory, "I suppose you never hear anything about that Miss Granville—the girl you rescued from the mine, you know?"

Merlin flushed painfully. "Yes," he said, "I've heard. She's—she's—very well—I believe."

Vivian Gregory eyed him keenly.

"You are interested in her?" he said.

"We are engaged," replied Merlin.

Gregory looked at him. Haggard, pale, shabbily dressed, it seemed impossible to the young man that the young lady he had seen in Cornwall should be engaged to one in such different circumstances.

"Yes, I know what you are thinking," said Merlin. "I know I am not worthy of her; I know of the gulf that lies between us; but it's true for all that. I should have given up long since but for her. Sometimes when hungry, lonely, despairing, I should have thrown myself in the river but for her. She has always been light in the darkness, an angel to point me upward."

"And her father?" said Gregory, interrogatively.

"He hates me like poison. I believe he would almost as soon see his daughter dead as—as loving me; but she has braved that."

"And she knows of your present condition?"

"No; I have not told her how unsuccessful I am, how often I've been starving; I dared not. Not that it would have altered her," he added, quickly.

"And she's waiting for you?"

"Yes; until I succeed."

"And if you don't succeed?"

"That will make no difference to her."

Vivian Gregory's eyes shone brightly. He walked quickly up and down the room, as though he was excited.

"She realises all your failure may mean?" he said at length.

"Yes."

"And yet, no doubt, she has had what the world calls good offers?"

"Yes; Squire Newlyn's son proposed to her not long after you left."

"Squire Newlyn's son? Oh, yes; I remember. He's rich and well connected, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And she refused him for you, with your antecedents and prospects?"

"Yes. I say, Gregory—don't!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't talk like that. You make me feel ashamed of myself. You make me feel mean for having made her sacrifice such——"

"No; I did not think of that, Rosevear. I suppose I am fairly well connected, according to the world's ideas; but I don't care for that. In the world of letters, my boy,

we don't care a hang about parentage and position. Has a man brains? Has he the artistic instinct? Can he write? Those are the main questions that are asked in literature. Given those, a man may be a sweep, but he'll be recognised as a brother scribbler, and no questions asked. Of course literature means education, a certain degree of refinement, and a host of other things; but at the bottom there's no truer Socialism under heaven—communism, for that matter—than is to be found among men of letters. No, I was not thinking about your unworthiness—that is, if you are what I hope and believe you are; something else was in my mind."

"What?"

"The nobility of the girl. Brought up as she has been to—to give up—Rosevear, you are fortunate beyond the common run of men. Such a girl makes a man believe in God—and in *women!* But I thought—I was sure when I saw her that——" He stopped suddenly, and took a cigar-box from a shelf.

"Let's have a smoke," he said.

"I haven't smoked for four months," replied Merlin; "it must be something very mild."

"Here are some cigarettes, then. They are mild enough. And so you've found—well, I'm——" He lit his cigar and began smoking furiously.

"Do you know," he went on, presently, "that there's many a man pretty well at the top of the tree who would give up reputation, circulation, and income to know that such a woman cared for them in the way that Miss—Granville cares for you? Man alive, but you've something to live up to!"

"What worries me is that I have to keep her waiting so long. If only I could get a few pounds to last me until my novel was finished!"

"You think that will go?"

"I feel sure it will."

"Tell us the plot."

Merlin told him. It was indeed a beautiful idea, fresh as a spring morning, and pure as the dew.

"Ah! yes, I see," said Gregory; "she's inspired that."

"Yes, she did."

For ten minutes Vivian Gregory smoked in silence; he was evidently thinking deeply.

"I am pretty well off just now," he said; "my last novel has done well, and I received my publisher's half-yearly cheque only a fortnight ago. I will lend you a fiver, or a tenner if you like."

"Thank you," replied Merlin; "but I have a sort of ingrained hatred against borrowing money. It runs in the blood, I expect. It—it seems—poor, somehow. I should have written home but for that. If I could get work now."

"Excuse me, you are not a journalist. You don't seem to have the instinct for fastening on taking ideas. Have you tried the daily papers?"

"Yes."

"What did you write about?"

"The mining outlook in Cornwall."

"That isn't so bad; but, unfortunately, there's not much public interest in such a question. People nowadays like something with personal interest. Everything should pulsate with human life. You never thought of writing your experiences and emotions on coming to London, did you."

"No."

"Well, there's copy in that. By Jove, here's Jack Brooks coming."

"Who's Jack Brooks?"

"He's the sub-editor of *The —— Gazette*, the best evening paper. For the matter of that, he's practically editor."

He rushed to the door and let him in.

"Ah, Jack, old man," he cried, "glad to see you. Come in."

"Right, old chap. I'll have one of your cigars, too. Got anybody here."

"Yes, a chap from Cornwall, an interesting fellow—brains and pluck, but down at heels just now. You might give him a leg up," replied Gregory, in a low tone of voice.

"If the fellow can write, with pleasure; but no conceited country prigs or languid fools; mind that, Gregory."

"He's neither; he's—but you'll see. Come in."

Jack Brooks, of *The —— Gazette*, was a dark-skinned young fellow, below the medium height, but strongly built. He had a big, protruding forehead and brilliant black eyes.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Rosevear," said Brooks, on being introduced; then, taking an easy chair, he laid his feet on a table and smoked lazily, but all the time watched Merlin keenly through the thickening atmosphere of the room.

Brooks had a way of making people talk. He seemed to do so without effort. Moreover, the talk which he elicited was of a nature which indicated the mental calibre of those with whom he conversed. Thus it was that in an hour he had, in a metaphorical sense, turned Merlin inside out. He gave several grunts of satisfaction, too, during the afternoon.

"I say, Gregory," he said at length, "I must be going soon. Am I to get some dinner here, or am I to go to the club?"

"Mrs. Sadducee will be here to set the table soon, old chap. I'll bet you a tanner that the elder Miss Sadducee will quarrel with the younger Miss Sadducee which shall wait at table."

"I'll not take you. By the way, what is your landlady's real name."

"Let me see, it's—hem! Sloggett—that's it. But what

the girls are called I don't know. Sloggett is the name of her last husband; the others are dead. She's a descendant of the woman in the Bible. She kills off a husband in about four years—that is, the strong-constitutioned ones. Those with less powers of resistance succumb in about two. I give Sloggett about six months longer. He's getting thinner every day."

"Is she such a Jezebel?"

"Isn't she, that's all! She's clean and—miracle of miracles—she's honest; but for a tongue—hush, my boy! I hear the plates rattling outside."

Two strapping young women entered and prepared for dinner. Both were sprucely dressed, and both looked very smiling. When the dinner was laid Mrs. Sadducee herself came in. Her personal appearance did not belie Gregory's description. She was made on a very large pattern. Everything about her was exceedingly pronounced. She had a high colour, was very tall, very stout, and on the present occasion was very showily dressed.

"I'm not one as says much, Mr. Gregory," she said as she entered, "and, as you know, I'm not like some people who interfere with the liberties of their lodgers. I'm glad to see your visitors, sir, and I 'ope as 'ow they'll make themselves at home. I 'ope, too, as 'ow you'll like yer dinner. I'm a splendid cook myself, as you know, Mr. Gregory, although I'm not one as boasts; but I can't tich my gals, so I says to Glorianna and Henrietta, 'You cook the dinner,' I says. 'You know what young gents like,' I says; and so, sir, you'll have a dinner fit for a prince—a better dinner than you can git at any club, although I oughtn't to say it. Ah, if you only know'd what a treasure I've got in those gals—so clean, so careful; and altho' I'm their mother, I says that they are the finest gals in Chelsea. Ah, sir, it'll be a lucky man as gits one ov 'em."

"Which is the best of them, Mrs. Sloggett?" asked Brooks, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"I shouldn't like to say that, sir. I think they are both best, and it's jist a matter of taste. Ah, sir, the young fellers that 'ave come 'ere a-sneakin' about those gals! But Glorianna and Henrietta do both say 'No, ma, we will 'ave none ov 'em; if we ever do git wed, it must be to some litery or hartistic gentleman.' And says I to 'em, 'All right, my dears; you'll be treasures to whoever gits 'ee,' I says."

"I lay up all my treasures in heaven," said Brooks, solemnly.

"Ah, sir, you litery gents will 'ave yer jokes; but see ef you don't enjoy yer dinner. I'll look in agen when you've finished, and then you can tell me."

"Do you get this kind of thing often, Gregory?" asked Brooks when Mrs. Sloggett had gone.

"Every time I get dinner at home it happens," replied Gregory; "as a consequence I nearly always go to the club."

"Well, it seems a jolly good dinner. Did those girls cook it?" asked Brooks.

"Not they. They will have been upstairs fixing themselves up while their mother has been frying over the fire in the kitchen."

"Oh, the maternal affection! Gregory, my boy, a subject for your next novel."

After dinner and a further address by Mrs. Sloggett Brooks took his leave.

"Sloggett can't last long," said Brooks, solemnly; "flesh and blood cannot stand it. I have never seen the man, but I have made a special study of the human powers of resistance. I mean to make an investment, Gregory."

"Yes, in what?"

"I am going to insure Slogget's life. Good-bye, old man.

By the way, Rosevear, if you like to send me something—say on a countryman's first sensations on coming to London to make his fortune, or something of that sort—I might use it. You know the kind of thing—feeling of loneliness, hurrying crowds, bewilderment, and so on."

"Thank you very much," said Merlin.

"Sooner the better, you know, only they must be well done. You have some pathos in you; use it. I might use three articles if they are good, none if they are not. Good-night."

An hour later Merlin went back to his room with a sovereign in his pocket, which Gregory had insisted on his taking. No sooner did he arrive than he sat down and commenced working. When he had finished he saw the light of morning stealing into his dingy room, and heard the clock of St. Paul's striking four.

"There are three articles," he said, "and I believe they'll do. I wonder why I never thought of the topic before?"

The next evening he saw the first of the series in print, and two days later he received a cheery letter from Brooks, with a cheque which made his eyes gleam with pleasure.

"You have done them very well," the letter ran. "Use your brains and think of another taking subject; I don't mind what as long as it will interest the public. *The —— Gazette* is always glad to pay well for good stuff."

On receipt of this letter, Merlin turned to his novel with greater eagerness than ever. "I must get it finished in time for the autumn sales," he said, feverishly.

A few weeks later he took his novel to a well-known publishing house. It was not a pot-boiler, although he had written it rapidly. He felt concerning it when he laid his pen down that the story had been in his heart for years, and that Helen Granville's love had given him the power to tell it.

The publisher received him coolly. He had practically filled up his autumn list, and was tired of the productions of unknown authors. Out of the shoals of MSS. which had been submitted to the firm that season by new writers, he had been able to accept only two, and he had grave doubts concerning the success of these.

"Could you let me know at once?" asked Merlin. He felt confident that his work was unconventional and strong.

The keen man of business looked at him with a discriminating eye, and was favourably impressed. "You are anxious to know soon?" he said.

"I want it published this autumn," he said; "and if it will not suit you, I don't want it to be delayed so that another firm could not issue it this season."

"The fellow is confident, at all events, thought the publisher, who was always on the look-out for new writers, in spite of his non-success. "Yes, I'll let you know in a week," he said, "and if it will suit us and we can come to terms, I'll have it set up at once."

Merlin could not work for the next three days; he was excited, feverish. Moreover, the strain of the past had told on him, and his nerves were far from steady. He did not trouble so much, however. He had a little ready money, and so could afford to idly dream of the future, and to build bright castles in the air.

At the end of three days a letter came to him by the last post. On scanning the envelope, he saw that it bore the name of the firm of publishers to which he had taken his MS.

His hand shook like an aspen leaf as he tore open the envelope. It seemed as though his future destiny depended on the nature of the communication.

"Which is it to be?" he thought, as he unfolded the enclosure. "I am afraid to read it."

CHAPTER XI

"LOVELIGHT"

"ACCEPTED!"

Merlin Rosevear waved the letter above his head as he excitedly walked around his little room.

"Accepted!" he repeated again and again, as he re-read the publisher's communication.

At last he had won—he was sure he had. His book would make a sensation, of that he had no doubt, and then——!

He threw himself on the little chair-bed, and began to dream of the future. Since he had come to London he had read how brilliant authors had been *fêted*, how they were welcomed into the best society, how they had made huge sums of money. He would be a brilliant author—and his future should be bright! How glad and proud Helen would be! How pleased his father and mother would be! His novel was accepted, and by a good publishing house. He read the letter again.

"DEAR SIR,—We have carefully considered the novel you submitted to us on the —th inst., and have pleasure in making you an offer of £— for the copyright. We shall be pleased to hear from you in relation to the matter at your earliest convenience.

"Yours faithfully,

"QUILL AND STEEL."

Nothing could be more precise, more plainly stated. His novel was accepted! He could have shouted for joy. At last he had gained a hearing; he should at last see his name on the title-page of a book; he should be able to see what professional critics thought of his work. He had a sense of satisfaction, too, which was deeper than that which sprung from the acceptance of his story. He believed he had done good work. The idea was an inspiration; he had expressed the noblest dream of his life. He had done his best to write a book calculated to do good. He had tried to be true to his highest ideals in writing it, and he felt sure of success.

The dreary months of pain and weariness were as nothing now. The joy of the present atoned a thousand times for the dread hours when he starved on sixpence a day.

He thought of the sum offered him. No doubt Messrs. Quill and Steel would pay him at once, and the money would enable him to go to Cornwall and see Helen. He could go boldly to Mr. Granville now and ask for his daughter. He could tell him of the position which well-known literary men now occupied, and of the vast influence they wielded. On consideration, however, he decided to wait. Better to postpone his visit until his book was a success, and editors were sending him requests for work and offering him his own prices for contributions. It would not be long. The book would be out in a month, and then——

Next morning his prospects did not appear in quite such a rosy light. He had been told that good books were often failures, and that sometimes years had to elapse before a writer was recognised. He was glad that he had not written Helen the night before, and in the ecstasy of the hour told her he intended paying a visit to Cornwall immediately. He must wait, and wait patiently before

visiting Cornwall. On further consideration he determined that he would not go until his position was assured. Moreover, he began to consider the terms which Messrs. Quill and Steel offered him. They seemed very poor. Could he not get more than £—? He resolved to go and see Vivian Gregory at once and consult him on the matter. He was almost certain to find his friend at home, for he spent his mornings in work, and, as a rule, did not get to Fleet Street till lunch-time, when he generally had a gossip with his friends.

Merlin walked all the way to Chelsea. It was a chilly October day, and he felt that a tramp of three or four miles would do him good. Besides, he could not afford a hansom, while a ride in a 'bus was just then distasteful. Moreover, he had a certain amount of pleasure in shouldering his way through the Strand. He felt himself a conqueror now, and he fondly dreamed of the time when the very people he passed would point him out as the author of books which set the whole country talking.

Vivian Gregory was hard at work when Merlin was announced, but he threw down his pen and received him pleasantly.

"Any news, Rosevear?"

"Rather."

"Good or bad?"

"Novel accepted."

"Why, I didn't know you had finished it. You must have kept your nose to the grindstone. Who did you take it to?"

"Quill and Steel."

"Good. Let me congratulate you, my boy."

"There, read the letter," and Merlin threw it on the table.

Vivian Gregory read it hastily. "A small sum, but not so bad for a first book," he remarked.

"You think not?"

"As things go, no; but if it is worth publishing at all, it should be worth more."

"What would you do?"

"I believe in a royalty myself."

"But I'm short of ready money."

"Then arrange for a royalty, but get them to pay you a sum on account."

"Will they do that?"

"You can at least try."

A few days later Merlin had signed an agreement with Messrs. Quill and Steel, giving them all rights over his story on condition that they paid him a certain percentage on all copies sold, they at the same time agreeing to pay him the sum of £20 on account. This done, Merlin waited eagerly for the appearance of his book. He corrected the proof-sheets with great care, he lingered lovingly over every passage, and did all in his power to beautify awkward sentences. If ever a man's heart was in his work, Merlin's heart was in that first novel. He called the story "Lovelight," and he wrote the following words as a dedication:

To the One Who Inspired Me.

His joy knew no bounds when he received the author's copies. The book was well printed and tastefully bound. The little dingy garret seemed to grow large and beautiful as he fondly handled one copy after another At last his name was printed on a book, at last he had done something towards fulfilling the aim of his life!

He sent copies to his father and mother and to Helen. To the latter he wrote a long letter, full of gladness and hope.

"If the book achieves success," he said, "it will be because of you. You are the 'lovelight'; you are 'the one who

inspired me.' I am coming to see you as soon as the book is successful, Helen, and then—— I have little fear for the future now. My mind is full of new ideas; and do you know I never receive a letter from you but I always find it easier to work. My pen never drags heavily when your letters arrive. I think it is because they always stir my heart, and tell me of great possibilities. I can always hear the birds sing when I think of you, Helen, and life ceases to be poor and sordid when I am under the influence of your words. You make the air I breathe pure; you make it impossible for me to write what is ignoble. God bless you, Helen, I am not worthy of you; but when I think of you I cannot help looking upward."

Tears stood in Helen Granville's eyes as she read his letter. Proud and glad as she was to see the book, she was gladder to receive his letter. It atoned for the cruel words she had received from her father, and for the long months of weary waiting. She loved Merlin for the man she believed him to be, but the sight of the book cheered her, nevertheless, and Merlin was not more anxious than she that his venture should be a success.

"It is the joy of my life that I can help you, Merlin," she wrote back, "and I think I feel as proud of the part I have in 'Lovelight' as you do of yours. I could hardly contain my happiness as I read it. It is a noble book, my love; it is worthy of you. The wonder to me is that the one who could write it should care for me, living in this secluded corner of the world, unknown to the renowned people you will soon be meeting."

As Merlin read the long letter, one short paragraph of which I have quoted, he seemed to live in Arcadia. The roar of London was full of music, the rushing life of the city was delightful to think of. His heart throbbed with a great joy; life had never been so sweet before. It was with diffi-

culty that he restrained himself from starting for Cornwall at once; his happiness would be complete if he could clasp Helen's hands and feel her by his side. But caution kept him back; he would wait until his position was assured, and then he would go to Cornwall boldly.

A week later press notices began to come in. They were, on the whole, favourable, but unimportant. The book was the work of an unknown man, and was relegated to reviewers whose work it was to notice unimportant books. Scarcely one of the reviews exceeded a dozen lines. But they were friendly, and Merlin made the most of them. How hungrily he waited for them, no one but himself knew; how his eyes fastened and feasted upon the kindly remarks about his work, none but a young literary aspirant can realise. He was far from satisfied, however. His book did not make a sensation. He had hoped to see "Lovelight" mentioned everywhere; he had expected to see all the leading papers devote one or more columns to reviews of it, as they had done in the case of certain writers of renown. He wandered among the bookshops. He looked eagerly among the new books displayed in Ludgate Hill, Paternoster Row, and Cheapside, hoping to see "Lovelight" largely stocked, but he was doomed to disappointment. No notice was taken of his "dream." Now and then his heart beat with joy when he saw his book placed with others on the shelves in booksellers' windows, but it was only a single copy, without any prominence being given to it in any way. Other writers were represented by a whole heap of volumes placed one on the top of the other, but no particular attention was given to his work. Twice, with fast-beating heart, he went into shops where he did not see his book stocked and asked for it, but the salesman had not heard of it. He would be delighted to get it, if he, Merlin, would like to order it. In another shop, where he saw a copy of the story, he asked

how it was selling, and the reply was that they had taken only one copy, and it wasn't as yet sold. His face told of his disappointment, and the shopman, guessing how matters stood, said pleasantly, "But Rosevear is a new man yet, and people take a long time before they take to a new writer."

"Is that the case always?" asked Merlin. "Why, think of ——" and he mentioned the name of a popular writer—"her book became famous in a month."

"Yes," was the reply, "but she had friends on the Press, and got written up: besides, her book touched on a new theme, and people like new themes."

"I know the morals of the book were considered rather risky," responded Merlin.

"Yes, and that kind of thing takes for a while, but it quickly dies out," replied the shopman. "I've seen such writers come, and I've seen them go. People who were popular two years ago are not heard of to-day. After all, the writers who live are those who have a real, true, healthy story to tell, and who tell it in such a way as to be pleasing to young and old. Here's a book now," and he took a volume from a shelf—"this was all the rage ten years ago; to-day we don't sell an odd copy."

"I never heard the name of the writer," remarked Merlin.

"Very likely not, and yet ten years ago he was spoken of as one who created a new era in the world of fiction."

"Is that so?"

"It is, indeed. But there!—there is nothing more uncertain than books. Hundreds are issued every season, and many of them are never heard of. A writer must have very exceptional talents in these days to get a position."

Merlin went away from the shop with a sad heart. His little book was lost already; it had not made the name of Merlin Rosevear known. It was terribly disappointing, but

he was not daunted—he *would* succeed somehow. He owed it to Helen, he owed it to his father and mother. He would not go to Cornwall until he had won his spurs, and until the fact was admitted in the highest places. But how was it to be done? He had done his best, and his best had apparently failed. What steps should he take?

It is true he was not in any sore straits as to how he might obtain bread. By contributing occasional articles to *The —— Gazette* he could keep his head above water; he could pay for bread-and-cheese until better days came. But his dreams were unfulfilled, his longings were unsatisfied.

Another month passed away, and Christmas drew near. He had hoped to go to Cornwall laden with honours. He had pictured himself being received with great enthusiasm, and invited into the houses of county families because of the position he had made. But he dared not go now. The name of Merlin Rosevear was not one to conjure by—— yet!

"Well, how is the novel selling, Rosevear?" asked Vivian Gregory, just before Christmas.

"I don't know; only fairly, I am afraid. Anyhow, I've heard nothing that encourages me."

"You've not asked Quill and Steel, I suppose?"

"No. I shall wait patiently until they send me their account."

"Just so. But you mustn't be downhearted. The book hasn't had time to become known."

"From what I can see there is no possibility of it becoming known. There is scarcely a bookseller in London who knows anything about it. The book has been what is called 'travelled,' but the fools haven't taken it. The papers have not paid special attention to me, so 'Lovelight' has not been asked for."

"You asked at the shops, then?"

"At a few, yes."

"Oh, you needn't blush; we are all alike. When my first effusion came out, I stumped London from end to end. I asked for it in a hundred shops, and expressed great astonishment that they hadn't taken a large number. I told all the salesmen that it was the book of the year, and that the writer was nothing less than a genius. But they all told me that I was the first who had made an inquiry. I've got wiser since, and have learnt to take things as they come."

"That's because success has come to you."

"Not a bit of it. Besides, success hasn't come to me. I'm practically unknown; my books sell in small quantities, only just large enough to cause the publishers to be willing to take my stuff, and give me a few pounds. I'm no genius, and I know it. Still, I aim at doing good work, whether it be in writing a book or painting a picture. To me the success of a book is not nearly so much to be coveted as the fact that I am doing the best I am able to do."

A look of sadness came into Merlin's eyes. He longed for success, for position, for honour. He had seen his name on the title-page of a book and was not satisfied. He wanted that book to be in every home in England; he wanted to be great—and he would be!

"By the way, Rosevear," continued Gregory, "what are you doing on the evening of January 5th?"

"Nothing particular. Why?"

"There's to be a dinner at 'The Piccadilly.' You've heard of the 'Invincibles' Club,' I suppose?"

"A literary club, isn't it?"

"Well, it's everything. It's a free-and-easy sort of affair, which men of all sorts of professions have joined. I am a member of it. The committee have decided to invite

John Jones, the new literary star, to be the guest of the evening. Would you like to come?"

"I should of all things; but I—I've not a dress suit, and I suppose it's a swell affair?"

"Oh, bless you, it doesn't matter. The Invincibles are free-and-easy. There'll be a couple of hundred fellows there, and I shall be glad if you'll come as my guest."

"I should like it immensely, old chap, thank you?"

"Very well, then, that's settled. You are not going to Cornwall this Christmas, I suppose?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I'm not going there until I'm a success."

"Whew! But what — of — of ——?" But Vivian Gregory did not finish the sentence.

"I dare not, old chap. I suppose I'm foolishly ambitious, but I'm not going to Creekavose as a nobody. When I do put my foot inside that house, I will do so as one who has won a position higher than that which Mr. Granville holds —not as an unknown scribbler."

"And—and—Miss Granville. Is it fair to her to leave her—it may be for years?"

"Better do that than give her father a chance of insulting her through me."

"But think of what she may have to contend with. It would be no wonder if, under such circumstances, she grew tired of waiting, and listened to her father's advice."

"I'm not afraid," said Merlin; "besides, I could not go down there—yet; I really *couldn't*. Why, from what I can see the book will not be worth £40; while no one knows of it. No; when I go, I go as somebody, and not as a nameless nobody."

Gregory did not speak for a few minutes; then he said, slowly, "If I had a girl like that, old man, poor or

rich, known or unknown, I couldn't help going to see her!"

When Merlin Rosevear got into his dingy little rooms that night he sat for a long time thinking.

"I will see this new literary star," he mused. "I will measure his powers, and see wherein his strength lies."

After a while he got up and walked to and fro his little room.

"I will do it?" he cried. "I will. The time shall come soon when the best of them shall be glad to take my hand!"

CHAPTER XII

THE "LITERARY DINNER"

WHEN Merlin arrived with Vivian Gregory at "The Piccadilly" on the evening of January 5th, he found a large number of people present. He naturally felt very strange. This was his first experience of a public dinner, and although he had often heard of many of the people who had come that night, this was the first time he had seen them. His first impression concerning the gathering was that everybody was free and easy. General good humour prevailed. Men of all ages laughed and chatted freely, while formality seemed to go by the board. Men occupying the highest positions hobnobbed pleasantly with those of no standing whatever. A few wore dress suits, but the majority seemed regardless of attire. Some came in smoking jackets, others wore tourist suits, as though they had just come from a holiday. Evidently the gathering was a kind of reunion meeting. On every hand Merlin heard the greetings, "How are you, old chap?" "Glad to see you." "What an eternity since we met last!"

"Anyhow," thought the young man, "they seem to have no side; they are all as jolly as may be."

Still he was ill at ease. He was not a member of the club, and he was unknown to nearly every one. No one came to him claiming him as a brother knight of the pen; no one came to him congratulating him on the sale of his

last book. It is true that once or twice, when Vivian Gregory introduced him as the author of "Lovelight," there was a casual remark about having seen it noticed in some paper, but he could see that his book was regarded as unimportant, and, in spite of friendly words, his heart became heavy. He noticed, too, how the members of the club clustered around the guest of the evening, and how eagerly they courted his presence. Two years ago this same John Jones was unknown, and now he was courted by all. He had written two books, and they had made him famous. These two books the young man had read; he had tried to find out wherein their charm lay, and he had compared them with his own "Lovelight," much to the disadvantage of the work of the famous author, and yet no one seemed to know of the story which Helen Granville had inspired. Around him, too, were men who, as far as he could see, possessed no more than ordinary ability, and yet they were regarded as writers of repute.

Presently dinner was announced, and, owing to the fact of his being the friend of Vivian Gregory, Merlin sat near some men who were well known in literature, but who had by no means risen to the height of the guest of the evening. These Merlin conversed with, and could not help feeling that they, apparently, possessed no power greater than his own. Their grasp of truth seemed weak, their world was anything but large, and yet their books sold by thousands. Still he enjoyed their society, for they appeared to know everybody of note. This and that editor were friends of theirs, such and such a famous writer had lunched with them the other day. Besides, they knew all the literary gossip. They talked about the sale of this man's books, and of the title of the new problem novel which that woman had on the stocks.

Years later this kind of thing became very stale and dis-

tasteful to Merlin, but then he eagerly listened to it all, and thought how fine it was to be in the "literary set," and wondered what steps he would have to take before he might be a member of some inner circle which seemed to make or mar the destinies of budding genius.

At length dinner came to an end, and the chairman arose to propose the toast of the evening. Like many other literary men, he was not a great speaker. He stammered very awkwardly, and was painfully nervous. Mr. Jones, he said, had been asked as their guest that night because of his phenomenal success in literature. Two years before he had been unknown, and now his name was a household word. There was no village library into which his books had not entered, no reading circle in the land where his name had not become familiar. He delighted in this success, a success which he, the chairman, regarded as the "highest of all successes." He then went on to speak of the glories of literature, of its influence upon individual character, and of its power in the nation. After this he enlarged on the merits of Mr. Jones's work, and how he deservedly occupied his position in the foremost ranks of the writers of the time.

To Merlin's surprise, the chairman's remarks were not greeted with the cordiality he had expected. Instead of universal applause, there was only faint approval, while ofttimes a sneering remark was made loud enough to reach his ears, although too low to be heard by either the chairman or the guest of the evening.

When John Jones got up to speak, however, there was much applause, although many present manifested no feeling whatever. The literary star was nearly forty years of age, possessed a fine face, and spoke with ease. His speech was very modest. He was sure, he said, that he did not know why his two unpretentious books had been so warmly received by the public.

"I can tell him," said some one sitting close to Merlin; "it has been done by log-rolling."

"Neither do I know why I above so many others should have been chosen to be invited as the guest of this important club," went on Mr. Jones; "many of you have done work far better than mine, and therefore I am obliged to conclude that your kindness of heart rather than your judgment has been the main factor in bringing me here."

"All bosh," whispered Merlin's neighbour. "Jones has now considerable influence on the leading literary journals, and the committee of the club know it."

After this, although Merlin listened closely to the speeches which were delivered, they lost a great deal of their interest. He could not help wondering whether his neighbour had spoken truly, and whether success was largely the result of careful management. Anyhow, he determined to think out the matter carefully.

After the speeches were over there was general conversation; much laughter was heard, and many good tales told, but Merlin did not enjoy the gathering. His heart was bitter, his vanity was wounded. He could not help realising that he was a nobody. Many names were mentioned, but no one thought of Merlin Rosevear; many books were discussed, but of "Lovelight" nothing was said. At that time he did not realise that the guest of the evening was nearly twenty years older than himself, he did not remember that the best men had won their way slowly and through hard struggling. He thought rather of Dickens, who leaped to fame in a few months, and of later day "stars," who suddenly appeared in the literary firmament.

About eleven o'clock Merlin bade good-night to Vivian Gregory and walked away alone. He did not desire any further company just then; he wanted to be away from the crowd, and be alone with his own thoughts. The night was

clear and frosty, above the stars twinkled, while the moon illumined the great city. As he walked down Haymarket the crowds jostled him; the theatres and music-halls were beginning to empty themselves; on every hand was the roar of wheels and the rush of humanity. In an hour or so later London would be quiet, but now the pleasure-seekers made merry. He did not notice the great social contrasts which were everywhere to be seen. The laughing crowd told him no story; the vice that walked openly and was not ashamed neither touched his pity nor aroused him to indignation. Let men laugh and women dance—aye, let the world sin—it was nothing to him. The great thing that troubled him, as he threaded his way along, was that he was an insignificant unit. If he died that night, his death would be unrecorded on the morrow. He might leave London for ever, and London would not know. Down in Cornwall the villagers recognised what they called his "talents," but in the metropolis he was nobody.

He crossed Trafalgar Square. Around him were stately buildings, some of them of world-wide renown. In the National Gallery the productions of men of genius were enshrined. Many of the names of men whose works were represented in that historic building would go down to future generations. Not far away was the British Museum, the national storehouse of greatness, while in another direction were Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. He saw the statues of the great everywhere. Above him rose the Nelson monument; around him, within the radius of a mile, the British nation had erected memorials to her most renowned sons. But the poor, the insignificant, the mediocre, were not remembered. They died and were forgotten. It was only the mighty men, mighty in thought and deed, whose names were handed down to history.

The crowd passed on—the sinful, the pure, the sorrowful,

the gay, and on the whole the people did not seem unhappy. Now and then he heard the hollow laugh of sinful mirth; he saw the hideous marks of corruption, still the great mass did not appear sad. Of course they were the well-fed, well-dressed portion of humanity, but they were all mere cyphers like himself. And yet apparently they felt not a weight on their hearts like that which rested on his. They were content to be lookers-on in the great drama of life, or, if they took part, they did not covet greatness or notoriety. Many who passed him were doubtless young clerks, who had taken their sweethearts, sisters, or friends to some place of amusement; some were fathers and mothers who had accompanied their children to a healthy place of entertainment, while hosts of the crowd had come from the country and wanted to see the sights. To-morrow many of these people would be hard at work in the home, the office, or the shop, and on the whole they would be fairly content. Why could not he do likewise? No, they might be satisfied to be nobodies, but not he.

The Strand was full of people; the stream of 'buses and cabs continued, all filled with people, while on the side-walks there seemed an endless procession of human forms.

"And ninety-nine out of every hundred of them will strive and toil, grow old, and then die and be forgotten," he said, as he trudged along. "The French word is expressive of this nameless crowd; all these people are the *canaille*. For my own part, I would rather be a renowned fool than be mediocre."

He thought of the gathering he had left. Mostly they were among the picked intellects—some of course were unknown—but many were the directors of life's forces; they voiced the feelings of the nation. He felt that he had been a nobody there, and now he had come out among the hungry unknown crowd, and he was a nobody still.

The people became hateful to him; he would get away from them all, so he turned aside from the Strand and found his way to his lodgings along some unfrequented streets.

"Well, Mr. Rosevear, I 'ope as 'ow you enjoyed yourself at yer gatherin' of litery gents," remarked Mrs. Blindy as he passed her sitting-room on his way to his own.

"It was a very brilliant affair," he replied.

"I've no doubt as 'ow it was. For my own pawt, I wish as 'ow my 'usband took to writin' books, or pintin' pictures, or suthin' ov that sort, instead ov slummin' for the awmy. He never gets invited to no feeds at all, and, as fur sasiety, I never sees none. And that, Mr. Rosevear, is awd for a person who 'as bin brought hup as a lidy."

"I suppose it is," remarked Merlin, who wearily entered his little room.

"It is indeed," said Mrs. Blindy, who busied herself with the lamp which stood on the table. The truth was she had stayed up late so as to have a chat with Merlin, and to have particulars about the dinner to which he had gone. "As I often says to 'Arry," she went on, "wot chaunce are we givin' our gals? 'Wot genleman,' I says to 'Arry, 'will pick up with a gal whose fawtha spends his time agoin' slummin'?' But 'Arry tikes no notiss, he jist goes on singin' and prayin', and bringin' 'ome Salvation Awmy captings. I wish yer cud 'a took 'Arry with you to-night, Mr. Rosevear; it might 'a mide 'im a bit hambishus to see some litery gents."

"Just so," responded Merlin, anxious to be rid of her.

"And I was jist a'thinkin', Mr. Rosevear, that if you would like to bring any of yer litery friends 'ome to a dinner, you are quite welcome to my sittin'-room, and my gals will be delighted to wait on 'em. I want 'em to see some gents other than awmy captings, you know, Mr. Rosevear."

"Thank you, Mrs. Blindy, I'll remember your kindness."

"I know'd as 'aw you was suthin' out of the hordinary that night you kime," went on Mrs. Blindy. "You 'ad a difrent cut from the awmy people. That was wy I was so hankshus to mike you comfortable, for I asshua you, Mr. Rosevear, that it's orfully awd for a pusson who es bin brought up as a lidy to tike in lodgers. But 'Arry don't see it. 'E jist goes on with 'is slummin'. And I allays liked litery people, Mr. Rosevear. My fawtha used to write acrostics, Mr. Rosevear, and nobody knows 'ow I sacrificed my pr'de in comin' down to marry 'Arry."

At length Mrs. Blindy left him alone, and he was able to think. He picked up a copy of "Lovelight," and read a few of its pages. It was well bound and well printed. It was well written, too, and many of the passages contained great beauty, yet no one knew of it. It was a better book, a far better book than many of those which found a place in every circulating library in the land, and yet——

He looked around the dingy garret. It seemed the very embodiment of poverty. He compared it with the fine dining-hall at "The Piccadilly," and the dirty walls of the little room seemed to come closer together. The place felt damp and stuffy too; he found it hard to breathe there.

He sat for a long time, and then he started up. The clock at St. Paul's Cathedral was striking one. He ought to go to bed, but he felt he could not sleep; he wanted to go out into the streets. There he should have room, and air.

Putting on his overcoat, he went down the rickety stairs, and a few minutes later stood in the Strand. The city was now silent, the thronging crowds had gone. No longer did the noise and rush of wheels drown all other sounds. He could walk along the busiest thoroughfare in the world without meeting a single soul, save, perhaps, a solitary police-

man, or some poor creature of the night who hurried along with trembling footsteps, fearful of her own shadow as it appeared in the streets.

He walked eastward. The sky was now perfectly clear, the bright moon sailed serene; so bright was it that the stars were almost invisible. As he trudged along Fleet Street, he remembered it as he had first seen it. What tumultuous thoughts the hurrying crowds had aroused in his mind! What fond ambitions caused his heart to beat time to the tread of a million feet! Nearly a year had gone since then, and his dreams were not realised. He remembered the words Helen Granville spoke to him as he bade her good-bye, words which had so often rung in his ears in his hours of disappointment. He had risen but little in the social scale since then; he still lodged in the same humble compartments, he still fared hardly. But Mr. Granville's position appeared in a different light now. After all, what was the owner of a place like Creekavose? Little more than a yeoman. True, he had an old name, but what was that worth in London? Supposing Mr. Granville came to London, who would know him? Whatever he had learnt besides, he had learnt to understand Mr. Granville's true position in life.

And Helen? It was nearly a year since he had seen her bright eyes. She had withstood much for him. But if he succeeded, she would gain more than she lost. The wife of a renowned man of letters was surely better than the companion of a country squire, whose thoughts rose no higher than the horse on which he rode, or the trees in his park. His great desire was to make Mr. Granville desire his alliance with his daughter.

He came to St. Paul's Cathedral. How silently majestic it stood there, that clear January night. He remembered his visit there months before, when he was starving. He

had never seen the young Scotchman since that day; he would go and see him soon. Onward he went, past Cannon Street Station, until he came to the end of King William Street. He heard a cab go rumbling over London Bridge, and then, after hesitating a moment, followed it. He did not go far, however; his attention was caught by the many-coloured lights on the river. He leaned over the stone walls of the bridge and looked down. He saw the ships lying by the side of the river, while the waters surged onward to the sea.

How silent everything was! He was now in the heart of the greatest city in the world, the city he had determined to conquer. A year had passed and he had not conquered it. He looked around him. Everything was on a large scale. Yes, London was great! and it was hard to move it. A man might be practically king of a small provincial town, and be unknown here. But he *would* be known here. He WOULD! He felt that he possessed the power to make London recognise him, and that power should be used!

For a few minutes he felt incapable of thinking coherently. The river rolled silently onward towards the sea; the great hush which rested on the metropolis seemed to subdue his soul. He remembered Wordsworth's lines:

> "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
> The river glideth at his own sweet will;
> Dear God, the very houses seem asleep,
> And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

But the feeling soon passed away; he remembered all his hopes and ambitions, he remembered the insignificance of his own position that night as he mingled with men of renown. The very genius of ambition seemed to possess him, and, compared with fame, with great renown, even love seemed poor. Then he vowed a great vow.

"By some means," he said, beween his clenched teeth,

"by some means I'll make myself courted by the rich and the great! By some means I will make myself famous in this great city. No stone will I leave unturned until the Press and the people shall recognise me as a genius, as they have recognised Scott and Byron and Dickens!"

He was carried away as with a tide of passion. He forgot everything else in this resolution, because all else seemed small compared with it. "The bright fields of fair renown" seemed more to be desired than even love or honour.

Backward again he went towards his lodging, and, all unheeding of time, when he reached Ludgate Circus he turned towards Blackfriars Bridge, and, arrived there, walked along the Embankment. He had barely reached the Temple Pier when he heard a sob of anguish, and looking towards the spot from whence the sound came, he saw a dark form leaning on the cold stone wall.

CHAPTER XIII

UNSATISFIED

THE sight somewhat startled Merlin, for he saw at a glance that the creature who was evidently in sorrow was a woman. At first he fancied she must be one of the poor creatures who, destitute and starving, sought to end her misery, as so many others had done, by suicide. A second glance, however, showed him that he was mistaken. The woman was warmly and apparently handsomely dressed; she was, moreover, young, and, as far as he could see, good-looking.

"Can I be of service to you?" he asked, after hesitating a second.

She turned angrily. "No; I want no help," she said.

He was about to pass on, when he again heard her sob, and he decided to speak again.

"You seem in trouble," he said; "if I can help you I shall be glad."

"No one can help me," she replied; "that is——" then she hesitated.

"I am sure if there is anything I can do I shall be delighted," said Merlin. "It is very late—that is, it is early morning. Certainly it is not the time for a young lady to be alone in London."

She hesitated again before replying, then Merlin fancied he heard her saying something about "another time." Presently, however, she spoke to him.

"You do not know me?" she said, looking straight into his face.

He saw her features plainly. Her eyes flashed fiercely. She seemed young, and yet something suggested to the young man that she was older than she looked. Her face was almost classical in its form; the nose was finely chiselled, and the mouth, although compressed as if by pain, was not that of an ordinary woman.

"No; I do not know you," he replied; "I never saw you before."

"Would you know me again?"

"Yes, I should know you again."

"Would you do me a favour if we ever met again?"

"Certainly."

"Not that I suppose we ever shall meet again," she added, quickly; "so you are not in much danger of promising."

He did not reply.

"My request is that if you should ever cross my path you will not know me, or recognise me in any way."

"Yes, I will promise that."

"And you have no engagement now?"

"No."

"Then if you will you can help me by accompanying me to the —— Hotel."

"I will do so with pleasure."

"Will you kindly walk into the hotel as though you were my friend, and bid me good-night as a friend?"

"Yes."

"The hall porter will then think I have been to—but it does not matter."

They walked together towards Charing Cross. Neither spoke a word for some minutes. Then Merlin saw that she hesitated, and seemed unable to walk.

"You are weak and faint, perhaps," said Merlin; "will you take my arm?"

"Thank you," she said, then she clutched his arm eagerly. During the remainder of the journey no other word was spoken.

They entered the hotel together; the porter scanned them curiously, while Merlin looked eagerly at his companion. A transformation had taken place. Her face had changed as if by magic, her eyes shone brightly but not fiercely, her mouth was parted with a smile, revealing white pearly teeth.

"Thank you for coming back with me, Mr. Neville," she said, gaily; "we have had a delightful evening, haven't we?"

He kept up the farce, for he saw the porter's eyes were upon them.

"Good night, Mr. Neville," and she held out her hand.

He grasped it as though they were old friends, and yet he almost shivered at her cold touch.

"Good night," he replied, trying to be gay. "I am so glad to have had the pleasure of seeing you safe back."

Nodding to the porter, he went out without speaking another word. To him it was a strange adventure, and as he walked along the now deserted Strand he formed many conjectures as to who she was. Her black flashing eyes haunted him. Her manner, at once bold and refined, strangely impressed him. Who could she be, and why was she leaning against the Embankment wall in evident misery? A great desire came into his heart to find out. He felt he would like to meet her again. The very mystery which surrounded her fascinated him.

All through the remaining hours of darkness he lay in his little room and mused of his experiences during the last few hours through which he had passed. He thought of the gathering at "The Piccadilly," of the vow he had taken down

by London Bridge, and of the strange meeting by the river. Then towards early morning he fell asleep and did not wake till nearly noon.

He felt unfit for work as he got up and dressed. His mind would fasten itself on nothing.

"If ya wer'nt sich a well-behived young gent, Mr. Rosevear, I shud think you'd got into bad wys," remarked Mrs. Blindy to him as she brought his breakfast. "I make nothin' o' 'Arry bein' out lite. Ya see he mus' do it, if 'ees to keep hup 'is slummin', but you, Mr. Rosevear, it do seem orful."

Merlin laughed in response to Mrs. Blindy's criticism.

"I told 'Arry about it," that lady went on, "but you men be all alike. 'Arry remawked that you must see London at night, if you would write about it, and 'ee says thet if you will come with 'im, 'ee could give you enough material to mike all our fortins. I told 'Arry to rite 'imself; for 'Arry hes great gifts, Mr. Rosevear, and I mikes no doubt but thet he would mike a sensition if 'ee was to tike to bein' a hawthor. But 'Arry says 'ee's too busy doin' Awmy work to seek fame and glory by bein' a hawthor. 'Wy,' I ses to 'im, 'it's as easy as nothink,' I says; 'you with your hedication and ability,' I says, 'could just write a novel in a week or two, and then see wot it wud mean for the gals,' I says; but 'Arry hain't a got no ambishun at all. I says to 'im 'Nothin' ain't easier than writin' a story-book. Jist remember I was brought up a lidy for the sike of the gals,' but 'Arry jist laughs and goes on with 'is slummin'."

Mrs. Blindy talked until she was out of breath, her face becoming more and more purple each minute, but seeing Merlin was in no humour for talking, presently left him with the remark that it was "awd for 'er who was brought up as a lidy to tike in lodgers."

At half-past one Merlin found himself at the door of

Vivian Gregory's lodgings. He wanted to talk with him, and he found Gregory as lazy as himself.

"You left early last night, Rosevear?" remarked the young man, lighting a cigar.

"Yes."

"Why, were you tired of it?"

"Yes—no."

Gregory looked at him keenly. "What do you mean, my boy?" he said, kindly; "are you put out about something?"

"I don't know."

"What the Dickens is the matter with you? Weren't the fellows chummy with you? Did any one snub you in any way?"

"No, oh no; every one was kind."

"Then what's up?"

"Everything is up, Gregory. Look, do you believe that success depends on literary puffing? Do you believe that in order to get on one has to get in with these newspaper chaps and that kind of thing?"

"What has put that sort of drivel in your head?"

"Well—well—last night, I—I was nobody."

"Of course not—you've done nothing yet. Wait a year or two till your name gets bandied about, and you'll get more notice than you care for."

"But how am I to get my name bandied about. I tell you, Gregory, my book is worth a dozen such things as those of Jones, the lion of last night. And yet who knows about it? The thing has been out nearly three months now. The newspaper notices have all come in, and the book is practically dead. No one knows about it, and I—well, I'm nobody."

Gregory looked at him half-questioningly, half-pitifully.

"Do you care so much for notice—for fame, Merlin?" he asked.

Merlin was silent.

"Because if you do there is little hope of your doing downright good work."

"I don't believe it."

"Look here, my lad," and Gregory started to his feet and began to pace to and fro the room. "I'm twenty-nine, nearly thirty in fact. I've been in what is called the literary set for years, that is, I've been scribbling and painting, and meeting with artists and bookmen of all sorts, and although I'm yet only a young fellow, I have come to this conclusion: all this newspaper popularity, all this toasting at public dinners, all this notice of men of position is worth infinitely little. What have you or I to do with it all? Let us see that we do good work, clean work, and let the results take care of themselves. What are reviews? The opinions of single individuals. What is fame? And popularity? Well, there is one book which I don't read much, I'm afraid, but I remember the story about the Founder of Christianity. One day the popular voice was 'Make Him King!' the next day it was 'Crucify Him!' That scene has been repeated many times since then in many ways."

"But do you believe that newspapers and popular reviews have so much influence upon a fellow's prospects as some of those chaps at 'The Piccadilly' seem to believe?"

"Hard to say. For my own part I believe that in the long run good work will live. A mediocre fellow may be written into fame, but that same fame quickly dies away. I don't believe in these vogues, and I have no faith in newspaper puffs. In the long run it is good clean work which lives, and even if it doesn't we must do it. What has a true artist to do with reviews, and fame, and big circulations?"

"It is all very well for you, Gregory. Your bread is buttered, and your position is practically assured."

"Well, and so is yours. You are now out of the wood as far as bread and cheese are concerned. You can get a few occasional articles in the ——- - *Gazette*. That will keep the wolf from the door. I've no doubt, too, but that Quill and Steel will take your next book. What, then, have you to bother about?'

"I have much," replied Merlin. "I owe it to—to—-"

"Yes," responded Gregory, quickly; "and if I know her at all, from what you have told me, she would rather wait until you had fairly won a position than that you should win it by puffing. She would rather you should do good work than showy work."

"But I need not do showy work," responded Merlin; "I will do the best work that I am capable of doing, and at the same time take steps to get noticed."

"If that is all you do, it will not be so bad," responded Gregory, "but it is a dangerous game. This everlasting love for praise means death. A man who writes with the critics in his mind is like a Samson shorn of his locks. Be patient, man, do the best work you can do, tell out the best dreams of your life, and let all the rest go to the lower regions."

"But, but——"

"I tell you, Rosevear, there are no buts. Flattering reviews and puffing paragraphs don't make great books or great writers. It's all the other way about. Nothing but good work makes books that will live. I know all this is a string of platitudes, but it's true, for all that."

"But to go on for years and years and never be noticed, to labour in the dark, ay, and in poverty, I can't bear the idea."

"What of Wordsworth? What of Robert Browning?

What of Goldsmith? What of a host of others? They did good work, and the rest followed."

"But I want the 'rest' while I am alive; yes, while I am young and able to enjoy it. Of what use to me is praise after I am dead? Let me have it while I am young and capable of appreciating it, let me have the money which popularity brings while I am able to 'drink the sweets of it.'"

"Very well, Rosevear, you'll do as you think best. We don't see exactly alike. But pray don't build yourself up with the idea that reviews will do what you evidently think they will. I know there is such a thing as log-rolling; I know that many a man has been written up who has had but little good stuff in his make-up, but for Heaven's sake don't pander to it. Besides, the leading papers—the papers which really influence—don't praise bad work, mind that, Rosevear. I know several of the fellows on *The Athenæum* and *The Spectator*, and I tell you they are as keen as men can be made. They'll detect the sawdust in your dolls very quickly, ay, and knock it out of them, too. Do good work, old chap, and let the rest take care of itself."

"Yes, I'm going to do good work, Gregory, but I'm going to—to——"

He did not finish the sentence. He walked to and fro Gregory's apartment as though excited, then he took his hat and went away, leaving his friend alone.

"Poor beggar," mused Gregory after he was gone. "He's bitten. The god he's ready to fall down and worship is fame and flattery. It comes to all of us, I expect, this mania for getting on; but he's got it bad." Then Gregory lit another cigar, sat very quietly in his armchair, and looked steadily into the fire.

Meanwhile, Merlin walked to Sloane Square, and, arrived there, got on top of a 'bus and rode to Hyde Park. It was

a clear afternoon, and, in spite of the fact that it was January, the day was fairly warm. He sat down for a few seconds on one of the park seats, and then walked slowly beside one of the main roads. He could scarcely understand his own thoughts at the time; he was strangely unsettled.

He had not gone far when he saw a handsome equipage approaching him, and then his heart gave a great bound. Seated in the carriage by the side of an elderly gentleman was the lady he had seen the previous night. She looked older in the daylight than in the glare of electric light. There was a look of languor and hopelessness on her face, there were dark shadows around her eyes, and she appeared bored. And yet she was handsome—strikingly so, and Merlin wondered more and more who she could be.

The carriage approached him slowly, so that he had time to assure himself that it was the same lady with whom he had parted at the hotel a few hours before. As she came nearer to him she lifted her eyes and, from the start she gave, he was sure she remembered him. Beyond this, however, she gave no sign of recognition, save that a flush tinged her cheek. She looked straight on, not appearing to notice him. Evidently she expected him to be true to the promise he had made on the previous evening.

"Who can she be?" he exclaimed. "Evidently a lady of position. Why, then, was she leaning over the Embankment wall last night as though in sorrow? But there, doubtless there was some sufficient reason. What relation is she to that old fellow by her side—daughter or wife? Anyhow, she is very beautiful, very fascinating."

He crossed the Park and came into Park Lane. There seemed a wide gulf between the people who lived in these great houses and himself—the miner's son. Twelve months before he had been a clerk at the mine, with

£1 a week as his wage; now he lived in a stuffy garret, with only a precarious mode of earning his daily bread. Still, he had entered the brotherhood of letters, he had come into contact with men whose names were household words. Would it not be possible to enter those houses as a friend and an equal?

These thoughts had scarcely passed through his mind when he saw a man coming down the "Lane" whom he had met at "The Piccadilly" the previous night.

"Mr. Rosevear," he said, crossing to him, "I was just thinking about you. Let's go somewhere for a chat."

Merlin walked away with his companion, delighted at his friendly tone.

CHAPTER XIV

"GETTING ON"

"I'VE read that book of yours this morning," remarked Merlin's companion, whose name was Pascoe, as they walked down Piccadilly.

"Yes," said Merlin, eagerly.

"It came to me for review," remarked the young man. "I had taken no notice of it, but seeing you last night, I was led to look into it to-day."

Merlin eagerly waited for more, but nothing was said until they came to a restaurant; then Pascoe went on, "Let's go in here and have a cup of tea; we shall be able to chat in peace." A few minutes later they had found a quiet place where they could talk without interruption.

"I left 'The Piccadilly' fairly early last night, Mr. Pascoe, but I think you went even before me," remarked Merlin, wondering why he wished to speak with him.

"Yes, I had an engagement," replied Pascoe. "Besides the affair was very tame. I was awfully bored. How did you like it?"

"It was all new to me. I have lived my life away from London, and although it may seem strange to you, last night was the first time I ever attended such a gathering. I was interested, excited, bewildered."

"Bewildered! How?"

"Well, I was led to wonder how some of the men there

gained their position. I could see nothing in them personally; I could detect nothing in their conversation that led me to think they possessed powers sufficient to gain public attention."

Pascoe laughed. "Most of it is pure chance," he said, presently.

"How?"

"Well, the public is fickle; it is practically inexplicable. People take on with pure imbecility, and the writer who happens to suit their palate for the moment is lionised. For a few years or months, as the case may be, he is the pet of the reading public; then he is forgotten. But that is by the way. This story of yours now."

"Yes," responded Merlin, eagerly.

"You have a good deal of power.

"Thank you very much."

"It's a pity though that you've written a prize-book."

"Prize-book! What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, it verges on the goody-goody. It's pretty in its way is this old style of love story, with the pure young man as the hero, and the innocent maid as the heroine; but that sort of thing doesn't go down nowadays. The public wants stronger meat."

"Stronger meat?"

"Yes. The truth is, I see you are an ambitious fellow, and there is no reason, providing, of course, you mean to continue in the literary world, why you cannot make something out of it. But you must be bold, you must not be afraid of Mother Grundy, you must be able to laugh at conventions, you must understand the signs of the times."

"I am afraid I'm a bit dense."

"Well, for example, the present craze is for the sex novel. Think of the people who are most talked about."

"I see."

They continued talking for a good while, and Mr. Pascoe spoke from a reviewer's standpoint, and with much worldly wisdom. After they had parted Merlin spent much time in brooding; success was appearing to him in a new light. Years before his great desire was to see his name on the title-page of a book; his desire had been realised, but the joy he expected had not come with it. Had his novel been a success, had it sold by many thousands, all would have been different, but it had not. Many plans formed themselves in his mind, many were the resolves he made, and the sum and substance of them all was this—"I *will* succeed; I will be recognised as a genius."

A few weeks later he received his publisher's account, and his heart sank like lead on reading it. Eight hundred copies only had been sold, and he had anticipated at least as many thousands. As far as payment was concerned, he had practically overdrawn his account. Financially, at all events, his novel so far was a failure, while apparently there was no demand for it. His resolution was not shaken, however.

"I'll do it yet," he cried, "I'll do it yet."

As Vivian Gregory said, he was out of danger as far as bread and cheese were concerned. He was able to write occasional articles for the —— *Gazette*, which enabled him to pay for his rooms and buy decent food. His early habits had taught him to be frugal, and he found it no hardship to be obliged to abstain from expensive luxuries. He was perfectly willing, like Chatterton, to starve in a garret if he could see a brilliant career at the end of his term of hard probation.

As much as possible he came into contact with men who wrote for the papers; he listened eagerly to their talk, and carefully weighed what he considered to be the value of

their opinions. As a matter of fact, however, he never met with men who wrote for the best papers: they belonged to another world than that in which he lived and moved and had his being. And yet he was much influenced by the class with which he met. He went far towards accepting their judgments, because he fancied that such as they carried the magic wand which could make him famous.

As the weeks went by he found himself laughing at his old ideals, and accepting the doctrines of the so-called "new school." The old dreams failed to fascinate him as they had years before. There was a time when he looked upon a novelist as a prophet and a seer of visions. In the days when he roamed the Cornish lanes, and listened to the roar of the great ocean, or when he stood on the rock-bound coast and watched the breakers as they churned themselves into foam on the great rugged rocks, he had dreamed dreams of enlarging the horizon of those who read his works. He had fancied himself striking at the hoary head of abuse: he had thought of himself as one who should help to hasten forward the day of better things. But now he began to regard all this as foolishness, as the fond imaginings of a lad ignorant of the ways of the world.

This change came slowly, but it came nevertheless. He wanted to be a success, and he fancied that what he desired lay not in the way he had marked out for himself in the old days.

And yet had his eyes been open he might have seen how worthless was much so-called criticism. Undoubtedly the opinion of a true critic is valuable, undoubtedly many a writer has been helped by the candid opinion of able and cultured men, but at that time he did not realise that much reviewing, especially in unimportant papers, was done by the merest tyros in letters. Years after he learned wisdom, but in those days he was blind.

One day he picked up a paper containing a review of a recent novel. The review condemned the writer as one who had sacrificed art for purpose, it sneered at him for being so much of a moralist, and so deadly in earnest. The notice in question was a flippant article on a serious book. He did not know that the best literary papers had spoken of it as a work of more than ordinary merit, neither did he realise that the writer of the "smart" paragraph he had been reading was a young fellow who had spent the previous night at a music-hall, and who, on the morning he had written the review, had hastily skimmed the book which he had neither the taste nor the ability to appreciate.

All this, however, had a great influence upon Merlin. It is true he did not lose all his fervour, neither did he altogether give up his old ideals; but he constantly wrote with the flippant reviewer in his mind.

As the months passed away he continued to write regularly to Helen Granville, but he did not visit Cornwall. He would not go, he said, until he could go as one who had conquered his difficulties and made a reputation. Helen constantly wrote him long, cheering letters, never complaining, never dwelling upon the bitter words her father was constantly speaking to her, and always telling him that she had no doubt but that he would succeed.

"You say you will not come until you can come as one who has carved out a niche in the temple of fame," she wrote. "If you knew how much more I cared for you than your fame, if you knew how I long to see you again, or realised how little I care about the many things which my father loves, I do not think you would stay away until your hopes are fulfilled. I dearly long for your success, Merlin, but I long to see you more; besides, surely a week

or two in Cornwall among your own people must be a necessary change for you amidst the roar and rush of London life. Still, you know best, and I trust you entirely. You will come when it is right to come, and I am afraid I am impatient and unreasonable. I know that Cornish life must appear very dull to you, and I am sometimes afraid that a country girl like myself must appear very dull to you who are constantly meeting with those who are brilliant and entertaining. Still love laughs at all that, doesn't it?

"George Newlyn was here again last week. He is constantly asking me to reconsider my decision, while father is very angry at what he calls my 'madness.' Especially is this so just at present, as he has met with further business reverses. He intended taking me to London next month, but says he is unable to do so now, as he cannot afford to go and stay at the best hotels as he used to do. Still, there's a better time coming. Write soon, Merlin; your letters are an untold joy to me."

When Merlin read this letter he sat for a long time with his face pillowed in the palms of his hands, as though he were thinking deeply, and when he was aroused from his reverie his face was drawn and haggard.

"Laws!" said Mrs. Blindy, as she entered the room, "'ow pile you do look, Mr. Rosevear! You're workin' too 'awd, thet's wot you're a doin'. I'm beginnin' to think, Mr. Rosevear, that a hauthor's life in't all a bed of roses. When my Laura says to me t'other day as 'ow she wur a-goin' to write a novel, seein' as 'ow she was so clever and well heddicated, I says to 'er, 'Laura,' I says, 'think twice,' I says; 'it in't all beer and skittles. See 'ow 'awd Mr. Rosevear works,' I says. 'It's all werry well to go to hauthors' dinners,' I says, 'but wen you've got to do sich a lot of ritin' for little pay, and then git cut hup by

those chaps as rites for the pipers,' I says, 'it tikes the gilt off the gingerbread,' that's wot I says to 'er, Mr. Rosevear."

"You are a wise woman, Mrs. Blindy," remarked Merlin.

"Not as wot I don't think it's 'ighly respectable," went on Mrs. Blindy. "It in't that. I miss good sasiety werry much, and thet's wot mikes me so mad with 'Arry and 'is slummin'. Still 'ee don't git 'eadiches like you do, while the pipers don't tike 'm off at all. As I says to 'Arry, I says, 'It's a good job for Mr. Rosevear thet he's got a landlidy who's as good as a motha to 'm,' I says."

Merlin did not speak.

"By the wy, Mr. Rosevear, you are not a-goin' to be in to tea to-dy, I 'ope," went on Mrs. Blindy. "'Arry and I are goin' up to Kew with the gels, and we 'ope as 'ow you can manage all right."

"Well, I did think of asking a fellow in to have tea with me to-day, Mrs. Blindy," replied Merlin.

"I 'ope you'll ask 'im to put it off, then. I knows you've pide me better since you've got on and took the two rooms, but it h'int enough to allow me to keep a slivey, and I can't mike myself into a perfect slive for you, Mr. Rosevear, although I 'ave come down in the world. It's very 'awd for one as ev been brought up as a lidy to tike in lodgers at all. As 'Arry says to me lawst night when my liver were out of awda, 'You jist confine yerself too much attendin' to Mr. Rosevear,' says 'ee."

Mrs. Blindy was about to continue her woes when Merlin, in order to have peace, told her that he would arrange to be out to tea, and then went into his bedroom until she should see fit to go back to her own domain.

Merlin was not able to do any more work that day, however. He read Helen's letter several times, and apparently it brought him no joy. When evening came on, however,

he met with some of his companions and passed a pleasant evening.

Shortly after this Merlin published his second book. Messrs. Quill and Steel had made no demur when he had communicated with them regarding it; indeed, they hinted that the orders for "Lovelight" were increasing as the weeks went by. Mr. Quill seemed desirous to have his MS., and assured him that he thought he would be able to do well with him if their relations continued constant and friendly.

He called the story "Spurs," and it was well received by reviewers. He still grieved that the leading papers paid it but scant attention, but he could not help being gratified at its success. When he looked at the bookshops he almost invariably saw "Spurs" stocked. Not that the success satisfied him. There was no rush for it in spite of the fact that paragraphs were constantly appearing in the papers. What he longed for was that his book should be honoured by having special articles devoted to it, and that it should be the talk of the country. The publishers were fairly satisfied, but he was not. He knew that he was unknown to the country, and even those who knew of him regarded him as one of the unimportant younger men.

A few days after its appearance he found his way to Vivian Gregory's lodgings.

"Well," he said, eagerly, as he entered.

"Well."

"Have you read it?"

"Yes," replied Vivian.

"And you like it?"

"My dear fellow, here are half-a-dozen papers praising it to the skies. What more can you want?"

"I want your opinion, old man. You like it better than 'Lovelight'?"

"Yes, and no."

"What do you mean?"

Vivian Gregory looked at him wistfully and sorrowfully.

"I think it'll sell, Merlin," he said; "but I don't think Miss Granville will like it as well as she liked 'Lovelight.'"

"It's a stronger book."

"Is it? I will admit it has been reviewed more favourably. That may be explained, however."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you wish me to speak plainly, Merlin?"

"Of course I do," responded Merlin, hotly; "I hate hints."

"Very well."

Vivian Gregory started from his chair and walked to and fro the room without speaking. He seemed to be debating as to how much he should say.

"I've no right to get into the pulpit and preach," he said, quietly; "you would be able to say with a great deal of justice, 'Physician, heal thyself.' I could repeat, with a wondrous amount of truth, the confession in the Prayer-book, 'I have left undone the things I ought to have done, and done the things I ought not to have done,' but I say it in all seriousness, that before I'd make up to some of these fellows"—tapping a heap of papers which lay on the table—"for a favourable notice, I'd sweep a crossing, I'd be a bootblack—I would, by the Eternal God!"

"And who has?" asked Merlin, passionately.

"Look here, Merlin, don't be angry with me. You and I talked together among those Cornish lanes, with that glorious sky above us, and the sound of the waves in our ears. You told me about your hopes, your ideals, your longings."

"Well, what then?"

"Merlin, here are six reviews. How many of them were written by the men with whom you are so friendly?"

"What of that? Is a fellow to refuse to allow one's acquaintances to say a good word about his work?"

"Put it another way, my lad. How many of those fellows would you be chummy with but for the fact that they are supposed to have influence on the Press?"

"You've no right to ask that question, Gregory."

"Haven't I? Very well, then, we'll say no more about it. Only you asked me what I thought of your book."

"Well, you haven't told me. You've started to insult me instead. Criticise my book fairly, and I'll be glad to listen to you."

Vivian Gregory hesitated a second; then he asked another question.

"What does Miss Granville think of it?"

"I don't know; she hasn't told me yet."

"Well, I'll tell you what I think of it. It's a clever book, and it will sell. I should not be surprised if it does not run into many thousands. But it will be forgotten long before 'Lovelight.'"

"Why?"

"Look here, Rosevear. Who told you to covertly sneer at the old ideals? In what way do you in 'Spurs' fulfil the dreams of a year or two ago? Why do you seek to arouse interest by risky situations? And why do you give up the fancies which you told me about?"

"Any one would think you were studying for the Church, Gregory. I had no idea that, in coming to you, I should meet with my spiritual adviser and be honoured with a sermon"; and Merlin laughed uneasily.

"Tell me, Rosevear," repeated Gregory, earnestly.

"Come, now, Gregory, it's no use taking that high tone. Any one would think you wasted your time on 'novels with

a purpose.' I found it was no use. I found that the dreams I had when in Cornwall were worthless. A year or two of London life knocks the nonsense out of a fellow. The code of ethics which does very well in a Cornish village won't do in London when a fellow has his living to get and his way to make. You know the old proverb, "When you are in Rome you must do as Rome does." Sunday-school morality and Sunday-school books don't take on here; you know it. What's the use of being so terribly serious? I want to make a name; I want to get on in my profession. For my own part, I believe in legitimate log-rolling, and it's no use being so blessedly squeamish in these days. I'll admit that 'Spurs' is not quite the book for the 'young person,' but who cares about that?"

"Well, I think Miss Granville will care about it."

"Look here, Gregory, leave Miss Granville's name out of the question. Everything has its price, and if I am to get on I must pay it. After all, it's not grievous."

"You'll be sorry for it some day, Rosevear."

"Not if I am famous; not if my hopes are fulfilled."

"Famous! What is the fame of a popular author? If you are seeking fame you'll become more widely known by becoming a music-hall singer, a tight-rope dancer, a pugilist. Take your popular author, and what is his fame? Suppose a book sells ten thousand, aye, twenty thousand copies—and that's a big sale, more than one in a thousand reaches—suppose each copy is read by five persons, that makes a hundred thousand. Well, you've been heard of then by one person in four hundred, and that one forgets your name the week after he has read your book. Why, man alive, the fame of a race-horse or a jockey is five times as great as that of the popular author. I tell you, if you have no real message to your age, like old Carlyle had, or if you are willing to let your message be untold because you want

to get popularity, for Heaven's sake go back to Besowsa mine."

"We are getting quite moral," laughed Merlin; "quite in earnest, too."

Vivian Gregory bit his lip, then he burst out laughing. Presently he grew serious again. "Four years ago," he said, "I knew a girl; she was very beautiful, very modest, and her mind was full of old-world notions about things generally. I did not fall in love with her, but I admired her more than I can say. She fulfilled my ideal of a pure, lovely girl, and made me want to be a good man. Last week I saw her again. She's a sort of queen in society now. Men everywhere admire her, and she is renowned for her cleverness and her advanced ideas. Years ago she was unknown; now—well, she's the rage. I had half-an-hour's chat with her, but she doesn't make me want to be a good man now. There, I expect I'm a bit sentimental to-day; let us change the subject."

Merlin found his way back to his lodgings in a very thoughtful if not despondent frame of mind. When he arrived there, however, and read a letter which awaited him, his eyes grew bright.

"I'll accept it, of course," he cried; "it's what I've wanted for years." He did not think then that the letter marked an epoch in his career.

CHAPTER XV

"LIFE IS A COMPROMISE"

THE letter which Merlin Rosevear received contained an invitation to a dinner. As far as he could judge, he would meet with people he had worshipped from afar. It would not be like the affair at "The Piccadilly"; there would be fewer guests, and the social element would be more strongly marked.

"'Spurs' has done it," he mused. "What 'Lovelight' failed to do, my new venture has done. Surely the temple door is beginning to open!"

His heart beat rapidly; his blood tingled warmly through his veins. At last the pleasures of a successful writer were coming to him.

When he had paid for a dress suit his finances were very low, but he had the satisfaction of believing that he looked well. Indeed, Mrs. Blindy expressed unbounded admiration when, on the evening of the dinner, she found her way into his room.

"Now thet's wot I calls suthin' like!" she cried, enthusiastically. "The general's uniform hain't nothink to it. It do look as if yer tailor was short of cloth, but I expect it's the feshin. And you look kind o' born to it, too, Mr. Rosevear. Them waiter chaps as I've seen at the hentrance of the Criterion don't look more genteel. As I've told yer, I've comed daan in the world since 'Arry took to slummin'

for the Awmy; but even in my best dys nobody comed to our house with a jeckit and shirt anythink like that."

For the first quarter of an hour after he had arrived at his destination he was far from comfortable. He was painfully nervous, and his surroundings were entirely strange. At the end of that time he saw, to his great joy, Vivian Gregory enter the house. Merlin had not informed him of his invitation. Somehow, since his last interview with him, he felt less pleasure in telling Gregory his plans. He hailed his presence with delight now, however; for, although his host and hostess had received him kindly, they had other guests to welcome, and Merlin longed for some one he could call his friend. As the evening wore away he was able to form some estimate of the persons present, and, to his delight, he found that many well known in literature had gathered together. The men and the women were nearly equal in numbers. The former behaved very much in the same fashion as those he had met at "The Piccadilly"; they talked gossip in a very friendly way, and did not seem in any way extraordinary. While delighted to be in such society, he was again disappointed. The old question again haunted him, Wherein lay their power? The latter interested him more. Accustomed as he had been to cottage life in Cornwall and humble life in London, he was a stranger to ladies in evening dress. At first he experienced a kind of revulsion of feeling; he asked himself how he would like to see Helen Granville in such attire while the bold gaze of a room full of men rested on her. Some of the ladies in particular seemed to vie with each other as to who should use least clothing. At the sight of others again he had difficulty in repressing a laugh. One lady, who had written a very bold book, was very angular and attenuated, and her display of collar-bone was, to say the least, amusing.

Another lady who, by no stretch of imagination could be called beautiful, and who had written a work showing up men "in their true light," possessed a very long, thin neck, and an exceedingly flat chest; these she exposed to the view of those who sat opposite to her at dinner, while she talked feelingly about "women in these days having other missions than that of being merely pretty dolls."

Down deep in his heart he had a feeling of contempt for these women. He had read their books and had been disgusted by them. Their novels were termed "realistic," but the greatest realities about them were what his mother would have called indecencies. Still they were the rage. Many reviews spoke highly of them, describing their works as "daring and unconventional." And so, in spite of what were termed his Puritan tendencies, he was willing to forget the things he did not like. Somehow these women had touched the pulse of the country, and were regarded among the successes of literature. Besides, he argued to himself, he was not in Cornwall now, and the morality among simple country folk could not be tolerated among that class of people. Moreover, had he not been told again and again that *risque* situations were eagerly welcomed by the novel-reading public. They described life as it really was, and novels, to be truly works of art, must be a true reflection of life as it actually existed.

Soup had hardly been served when there was an exclamation of pleasure, and he quickly discovered that the guests of the evening had been increased by notable people. He could not see them himself as his back was towards the door, but he soon discovered who they were.

"It's Mr. Winthrop and Mrs. Telford," remarked his neighbour.

"What! Mr. Winthrop, the great critic?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, there; you can see him now. He is sitting next to Mrs. Gray, our hostess."

Merlin looked eagerly towards him. He had often heard of Mr. Winthrop and longed for his acquaintance. He was regarded by many as the "high priest" of letters. What he said to-day a score of minor critics would say to-morrow. At least, so it was believed. For him to write a favourable review of a book and sign his name to it was sufficient to ensure the fortunate author a notable recognition by literary people. When men of his stamp did not notice a book, the writer was not supposed to be "considered seriously."

He was a fine-looking man. There was an absence of sympathy in his face; nevertheless, he looked what he was —a cultured and thoughtful gentleman. His keen eyes seemed to take in everything at a glance, and he possessed the power of calculating a man's mental status without difficulty.

"Do you think his power is as great in literature as is generally imagined?" asked Merlin.

"Among literary people it undoubtedly is," was the reply; "and a position in literature is almost impossible unless 'the faculty' recognises one. One may be read by the crowd, and yet be unknown to the select few."

"And it is the select few who——"

"Insures an author's position—certainly. Why, there are half a dozen at least in this room who worked for years without success; then Mr. Winthrop took them up, and immediately they leapt into fame."

"And would Mr. Winthrop recognise such a writer as, say, Amy Bennett?"

"Who?"

"Amy Bennett, she who wrote 'The Grey Dawn.'"

"Oh, dear, no!"

"But a large number of people read her books."

"Yes, that may be so. But who are they? The common people. No one in society has ever heard of her; she is not taken seriously at all. For my own part, I would rather that a book of mine should sell by hundreds among the select few than by thousands among the *canaille*. Besides, as a matter of fact, let the 'best people' take up an author, and the crowd follows like a flock of sheep."

Merlin looked at Mr. Winthrop again and sighed. That gentleman had not noticed his books; indeed, he had not been taken seriously at all.

"And who was the lady who came in with Mr. Winthrop?" he asked. "I did not see her."

"That is Mrs. Telford. She is Mr. Winthrop's daughter. She married Mr. Telford about two years ago. He is a rich banker. I think his bank is in Birmingham or Manchester, or one of the provincial towns. He is not quite a young man, and the two do not go into society together."

"She is young, I suppose?"

"Well, she is many years younger than her husband. You will be able to see her presently. She is sitting this side of the table, and so is hidden from sight."

"Is she very handsome?"

"She is generally considered so. She has very advanced ideas also. Have you not seen her book, 'Adam and Eve'?"

"Did she write that? Oh, I see, she uses a *nom de plume*."

He remembered the book; he had admired its daring, its keen insight into human nature; he had also wondered why it was written, and why the very genius of despair possessed the writer as she penned it.

Presently dinner was over, and the men adjourned to the smoking-room. Merlin tried to screw up courage to ask Vivian Gregory to get him an introduction to Mr. Winthrop,

but was not able. The great man was too far above him. He remembered that he had been a Cornish miner, and that he had not conquered a public yet. Two or three times when Vivian Gregory introduced him to people, and they did not appear to know his name, he felt ashamed and humiliated. It was so hard to be a nobody, and he set his teeth together and vowed again and again to win a high place.

When they rejoined the ladies he still felt uncomfortable. He was not able to talk glibly, he knew no Society gossip, and he was nervous. Vivian Gregory, he saw, was eagerly courted; his frank, genial manner won him friends everywhere, but he, Merlin Rosevear, was held in light esteem. Still he tried to appear at ease, and entered into conversation with those who, like himself, appeared unknown.

After some time, however, everything appeared in a new light. It came about this way. He had been talking with a young man about the influence of Mr. Winthrop upon the Press when, looking around the room, he saw a face which set his heart beating rapidly. For a moment he could not recall the occasion on which he had seen it, but presently it came to him like a flash of light. It was the face of the woman he had seen by the Embankment, close to Temple Pier, the woman he had seen in Hyde Park. He made a step forward as if to speak to her when he remembered the promise he had made. Her words came back to him with the memory of the expression on her face as she said, "My request is that, if ever you should cross my path, you will not know me or recognise me in any way."

He moved away from his companion, and found a spot whence he could watch her unobserved. Who was she? Why was she leaning over the wall by the Thames that night? Who was the man with whom she was riding the next day? He continued looking at her like one fascinated.

Was she young or old? She might be twenty-two, or she might be thirty-two. She looked young, and yet she might be old. Her features were fine, her skin was smooth and fair, her eyes flashed with strange brilliancy. And yet she looked worn and very weary.

"Hello, Rosevear!"

He turned and saw a tall young man by his side.

"I've been intending to look you up, but I lost your address. Besides, I've been out of London a good deal."

Merlin continued looking at him questioningly.

"You've got on, I hear. You said you weren't out of the wood that day in Paternoster Row; evidently better days have come. I've heard of your 'Lovelight' and your 'Spurs.' Let me congratulate you."

"Oh, yes; you are my friend, the Scotchman. I called at your lodgings at Bloomsbury, but you had left, so the woman told me."

"Yes, I had to go abroad. I came home about a fortnight ago. I am glad to see that you've got on."

"It's very little, I'm afraid. Do you know many people here?"

"A few. Mrs. Gray is a relative of mine. I expect that's one reason why I've been honoured by an invitation here to-night."

"Do you know that lady in dark silk, the one with black, flashing eyes. She is close to that piano yonder. There, Henford, the fellow who writes those Mahatma stories, is speaking to her."

"She! Oh, don't you know?"

"No. She—she has a very striking face."

"I should think so. She's the daughter of Mr. Winthrop, the High Priest of Critics. Mrs. Telford her name is; she married a millionaire. Of course, you know her. She has advanced ideas, and has, so some people say, a history."



"Do you know her?"

"Not personally. You see, I've been away so much. Besides, there are so many people here that it is difficult to know everybody."

"That is so."

"Should you like to be introduced? I can easily arrange it if you like."

"No, thank you—that is, not now."

Some one spoke to the young Scotchman, and again Merlin was left alone. Like one fascinated he kept his eyes on Mrs. Telford. Then, remembering that his behaviour was scarcely polite, he mingled with the crowd again, wondering all the time why she should stand, as she did that night, by the river's brink, and breathe forth a wail as sad as death.

A few minutes later he felt his arm touched.

"Mr. Rosevear," a voice said.

He turned and saw his host.

"I want to introduce you to a very charming lady," he said.

Merlin turned and walked with him, and a minute later he had gone through the formalities of an introduction with Mrs. Telford.

"I asked Mr. Gray to bring you to me," she said, quietly. "I wanted to speak to you."

"Yes, Mrs. Telford."

"You recognise me, do you not?"

He was silent.

"Oh, I allow you to break the promise you made to me. You see, we have met under ordinary circumstances."

"Thank you. Yes, I remember our first meeting well. I shall never forget it."

"But you must forget it."

"You shall be obeyed, Mrs. Telford."

"Sometime, perhaps, I may want to tell you why I stood by the river alone. Until then—it never happened, or was a dream—or—anything."

"Yes, it was a dream; nothing more."

"Of course, you know who I am now?"

"Yes, I have that honour."

"And I know who you are."

"I am afraid the knowledge is very unimportant, Mrs. Telford."

"By no means. Forgive me, Mr. Rosevear, but I am one of the few individuals who mean what they say, and are not afraid to speak the truth. I have heard of you. I have read your books."

Instantly Merlin's heart was all aglow. Any one who had read his books were endowed with special attractions.

"There is more in them than half the successful books of the season. Your name will be one to conjure with some day, Mr. Rosevear."

Her words sounded to him like some fabled elixir of life. He never heard a voice so sweet. He had for years been longing for this, and he felt as though life were endowed with a new charm. This woman fascinated him too. There seemed a mystery surrounding her, while her weird beauty held him as if by a spell. Besides, she was the daughter of John Winthrop, the great literary critic, the man to whom a hundred literary aspirants would bow the knee of submission.

They talked together for some minutes, he at first saying little other than assenting to her words, she speaking as one who had seen and who knew the things his heart longed for. By and by he became more at ease, and he conversed freely and well. She stimulated his mind; she touched hidden springs in his nature. He also seemed to influence her. If he was fascinated by her beauty, her talents, her unconventionality, she also seemed strangely interested in him.

As she confessed to herself afterwards, he was by far the most striking-looking man in the room, while there was something in his conversation suggesting a reserved strength that drew her towards him.

When Merlin left the house that night he was under a promise to call on Mrs. Telford, and, when he arrived at his rooms, he sat for hours musing over the events of the night. He had been introduced to Mr. Winthrop, who had spoken kindly to him; he had conversed with the most fascinating woman he had ever met; he had heard words about himself which made his heart glow with joy.

"It is coming," he mused; "the success I have longed for is coming. It is different from what I hoped for and expected, but I have learnt wisdom. But where will all this land me? What of my old dreams and hopes and ideals? What of Helen?"

Then he looked long and steadfastly into the fire. Sometimes his lips trembled and his eyes grew moist, as though tender memories were passing through his mind. "It's no use," he said at last; "life is a compromise, and I must take life as I find it, and not as I would like it to be"

CHAPTER XVI

THE RUBICON

"WELL, Rosevear, you've done it."

"Done what?"

"You know very well. Conquered your public, gained many friends on the Press, made yourself popular with society, and have not been unmindful of the mammon of unrighteousness generally."

"Well, Gregory, and don't you congratulate me?"

"No, I don't!"

"Why?"

"Because the game's not worth the candle."

Merlin was in Gregory's study, and he was walking uneasily up and down the room.

"How?" he asked, after two or three journeys across the apartment.

"Because you've not been true to your best self, and because nature always avenges itself."

"Still preaching, old man. You've mistaken your profession."

"Very well, put it down to that. But look here. When I knew you in Cornwall you were a fellow with visions. You had grand dreams and high ideals, and now——"

"Well, what now?"

"You are letting them all go by the board"

"Nonsense."

"You are."

"I have simply learned to see things as they are. When I was in Cornwall I did not know life, save the life of dreams and fancies and hopes. Since I've been in London I've had to face facts. I saw that my old ideals were no use here. I have simply adapted myself to my circumstances, that is all. I found that idealism meant starvation; I discovered that the dreamer was laughed at. I studied men, and I found that those who got on were men like those of Issachar of olden times—they had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."

"And so——"

"I did what every other successful writer has done."

"That is, you made friends with the Press. You sought the society of literary coteries, you chummed with fellows, ay, you sought the society of chaps who, under other circumstances, you wouldn't care to meet with, in order to get a favourable review. It grieved me, old man. You were miles ahead of them in brains, in ability; scarcely any of them could really appreciate what you were doing, and yet you seemed to live on the paragraphs they wrote about you. You troubled more about the success of your work from their standpoint than about its quality; you sold your birthright for a mess of pottage."

Merlin gave Gregory an angry glance, and again started to pace the room.

"You put it on thick, Gregory," he said, at length; "besides, you insult the fellows on the Press."

"No, I don't. I have as much respect for honest notices as any man. I know, too, that many of the reviews in the best papers are honest, conscientious, able criticisms. But the fellows who write them weren't the kind you made up to; they would scorn to puff a man simply because he was an acquaintance, but your *confrères* were not of that

sort. They were the poor penny-a-liners who are of the 'you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours' order."

"If they were such as you say they would not have helped me to get on."

"Neither have they. You have got on without them—that is, your true position in letters you owe to the quality of your work."

"Yes; but they have helped to get my work recognised."

"And in order to do this you are closing your eyes to visions; you are stultifying your finest perceptions. If you go on this way you will lose the power for doing real, true work."

"Humbug!"

"Very well, old man. I'll say no more if you don't wish it."

There was a silence between them for a few minutes. Merlin continued to pace the room, while Vivian Gregory smoked furiously.

"Come, Gregory," said Merlin, at length, "don't let's get raspy. You don't see things as I do, that's all."

"Very well," replied Gregory, "we'll not talk shop. Have you been to Cornwall yet?"

"No."

"Never since you left home?"

"No."

"Well, you *are* a dutiful son."

"Preaching again, old man. No; I've not been to Cornwall, but I've had father and mother up here, and I gave them a week of London life."

"And what of Miss Granville?"

Merlin was silent.

Gregory looked at him keenly. "It's all right in that quarter, I hope?" he said.

"Yes, she's very well."

"But you haven't seen her?"

"No."

"Why, you told me that it was arranged when you were successful you should go down."

"But I've not been successful—as I want to be."

"Well, you can't get on the top of the tree in a day. Besides, your fame has reached Cornwall, I know that; in fact, there were some articles in one of the Cornish papers on 'Our County Celebrities,' and you had a prominent position among them."

"Yes, I know it."

"Then surely you can go down boldly."

"I hate to be patronised by such as Granville," replied Merlin, testily. "I know I've been talked about, but I'm only one of the 'comparatively known' men. I'm not taken seriously yet—I—I——" He stopped.

"Well?"

"Well, I've ceased to care for men of the Granville type. Let him come to London, and what is he? Little more than a country farmer. Why, I hear that his brother treats him very coolly."

"But what has that got to do with Miss Granville?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Then what hinders you from going to Cornwall? By jove, it would make life worth the living to get away from the everlasting roar of London, and roam among Cornish lanes and along the Cornish coast, especially if——" and Gregory stopped, as though he did not care about expressing the thought in his mind.

"There is nothing in Cornwall that makes life worth while——"

"What does make it worth while then?"

Merlin hesitated a few seconds before replying, then he spoke rapidly.

"Fame, position," he said. "The curse of life is mediocrity, and genteel poverty. The joy of life is in being somebody; in being recognised as something above the common horde. To be of such importance that everything you do is noted; to have your work discussed by the best people; to be courted by society; to have plenty of money."

"There are very few to whom life is worth the living, then."

"Very few. For my own part I would rather be dead and out of it than to be a—a nobody."

Gregory was silent.

"What's the use of living as most folks live?" he went on. "What is the life of the great horde? Get up in the morning, eat, go to business, eat, go back to business, then go home, eat, and go to bed. That's the life of millions in this city. What do they work for? For bread and cheese and a house to live in. Well, I'd rather be dead than to live in such a way."

"You are not much of a prophet at present," remarked Gregory.

"Prophet!" and Merlin laughed bitterly.

"Well, and your plan?"

"I'm going to make myself a name, a position. I've got my feet on the ladder, I'm going to climb."

"Where?"

"Where Shelley, and Keats, and Scott, and Dickens, and Dumas climbed."

"And be buried at Westminster Abbey?"

"I don't want to talk of death when I think of renown. I'm young yet; I want to realise that my desires are fulfilled while I'm alive."

"And is that all?"

"What more can a man want?"

"Everything. To me you have not touched the kernel of life."

"And what is the kernel of it?"

"Love, service."

"Service! Come, Gregory, that's all humbug. If you serve the public you must serve yourself first."

"'He that saveth his life shall lose it.'"

"Preaching again, Gregory. I'm sick of preaching. I tell you copybook morality is played out."

"And love?" responded Gregory. "One would think you did not know the meaning of the word."

"One's views alter about love," replied Merlin.

Gregory looked at Merlin keenly; then he started to his feet, and strode up to him like one in a passion.

"Good God, man! what do you mean?" he cried.

"There is the love of the boy and the love of the man," replied Merlin, quietly; "there is the love of the youth ignorant of women, and there is the love of the man who—who—well, who has had experience."

"Oh, I see," responded Gregory. "You've come to that, have you?"

"I've been in London between two and three years," replied Merlin, "and I've been obliged to look at life as it really exists, to study men and women as they really are—that's all."

"And your love for Miss Granville?" cried Gregory. "Has that altered too?"

"Well, and what if it has?"

"What if it has!"

"Yes, what if it has? You are no chicken, Gregory; you know life. You've seen the show, and know what it all amounts to. Disinterested love, romantic love is all very well for boys and girls; it may be all very well to put into books—under some circumstances. But what does

it amount to? You know London life, so I need not answer."

"And marriage, my philosopher?"

"Marriage! Well, it can be a very good thing—sometimes. But see how the thought and feeling of the world have changed. Time was when readers demanded that a book should end happily, when everybody should get married and live happy ever afterwards. Now—well, it's all the other way. Life has other interests. And love—well, it's a funny affair and we'll talk no more about it."

Vivian Gregory looked at Merlin steadily, who kept his eyes on the floor.

"Merlin," said Gregory, "as sure as God lives you'll find out your mistake, you will, you will! Why, man, you are selling your soul to the devil."

"I thought we were to have no more preaching, Gregory. I know you were very kind to me years ago; you helped me when I sadly needed it, but surely that does not justify you in giving me a sermon every five minutes. Besides, I'm not going to stand it—there now."

"And Miss Granville?" asked Gregory. "Have you told her of your change of opinion?"

"Gregory, my connections with Miss Granville are matters which concern only ourselves. I don't see what you or any other man have to do with them. You have barely seen her, and never spoken to her."

"Oh, very well," replied Gregory; "I'll say no more; but—but, Merlin, you—you are the Man with the Muck Rake over again. Think, old man, think; we've been friends for years, and——"

"There, Gregory, preaching again. I know all you would say, and I must be going. I'm dining with Mr. Winthrop to-night, and I shall be late if I don't start at once."

"I see. Will Mrs. Telford be there?"

"Possibly. You have heard of Mr. Telford's death?"

"Yes; he leaves her half a million, I suppose. It is said she sold herself to him a few years ago for that half a million."

"Well, people are always talking. She is one of the cleverest and most fascinating women in London. Have you read her new satirical poem, 'Hymen'?"

"Yes, I've read it. It's the talk of society at present, I suppose. Your mother would call it a dangerous, unclean book."

"Well, mother will never read it. Dangerous! Every bold book is called dangerous, and, as for the other word you use, every writer who tells the truth is called unclean. There, I must be gone."

After he was left alone Vivian Gregory sat a long time looking at the book before him, but he did not read a line. A thousand conflicting thoughts were passing through his mind.

"And so he has learnt to sneer at love," he mused at length. "Well, to be loved as I would like to be loved I would give up money, position, and every poor little shred of popularity I possess. But love is not for me, I suppose. My God! what a blind fool Rosevear is to—to——but there!" And the young man took a fresh cigar from the box beside him.

Merlin spent a pleasant evening with Mr. Winthrop and his fascinating daughter, Mrs. Telford. He was on a friendly footing with the former now, who spoke to him very freely about his work. Before the evening was over the great critic had given his consent to have Merlin's next book dedicated to him. This fact had given the young man great satisfaction, and under the influence of Mrs. Telford's beauty and brilliant conversation he became an agreeable companion. Indeed, that lady regarded him

with great favour, and the hours passed away as if on the wings of the wind.

When he arrived at his chambers that night Merlin gave himself up to a long reverie. He was surrounded with every comfort now, for he had left Mrs. Blindy's rooms some time before, much to that lady's chagrin.

"I knows you've got on, Mister Rosevear," she said to him, "and I hain't one as grudges you your success. But it's awd for all thet. I took yer in when you wasn't nobody nor nothink, and hacted like a mother to ya. Often when my liver hev been in a terrible condition I've slived to mike things nice for ya, and now you are ible to py me better you jist tells me that my appawtments in't grand enough. Wot would you hev bin but for me, I'd like ter know! Wy, I know'd ya when you'd nothink but a dry crust for a ole dy, so you needn't sy nothink. But thet's the wy, thet's the rewawd one gits for bein' kind and generous."

"I'm obliged for all your kindness, Mrs. Blindy," said Merlin, "but I want to get out of the heart of the city a little. Here's a sovereign extra for all the trouble I've caused you."

"If these appawtments in't grand enough, Mr. Rosevear, I'm pufficklly willin' to let you hev our sittin'-room. It's a horful come-down for one who's been brought hup as a lidy, but 'Arry won't give up 'is slummin' for the Awmy, and so it caunt be 'elped."

It cost Merlin a good deal to get away, and Mrs. Blindy brought all the arguments she was capable of adducing in order that he might be enticed to remain, but he managed to escape at length, and succeeded in getting chambers in Bayswater, not far from Hyde Park.

It was to these rooms that he returned after dining at Mr. Winthrop's; it was here that he thought long and

deeply, while the old life and the new struggled for the mastery.

"What is done must be done soon," he said at length; "the final step must be taken some time. Why not at once?"

He went to his writing-desk and took from one of the drawers some paper; then he sat for a long time nibbling the end of his pen. As he sat the picture of his old home came before his eyes; he saw Helen Granville again as she appeared that Saturday night in the Cornish lane, and then he thought of the days which followed.

He tried to write, but could not; his hand shook, and his eyes were dim. Then he went to the shelves and took down the books he had written. He looked at them proudly, lovingly, and presently laid them down with a sigh. He tried to write again, and again he failed. From another drawer in his writing-desk he took a soiled envelope, and from it dropped a photograph. He saw the face of Helen Granville. It was fair and pure. The eyes seemed to look at him reproachfully, and yet he knew they belonged to a woman who was brave and faithful. He remembered what she had sacrificed for him. It was a noble face, ay, and it was the face of a noble woman.

"God bless you, Helen," he cried; "there's not another girl living who can claim to be your equal. And you love me, too—yes, you love me. You have no advanced ideas; you believe in the purity of love and the sacredness of marriage."

He took another wrapper from the drawer; it was highly perfumed. From this wrapper he also took a photograph. This likewise was the face of a woman; the features were classical, the beauty of the face was beyond dispute, and yet——. The eyes of this woman seemed to fascinate him, the smile charmed him. He read the letter

that had accompanied it, read it many times; especially did his eyes rest upon the words which preceded the signature.

It seemed as though his mind was trembling in the balance; he seized his pen and wrote rapidly, then with a steady hand he folded the paper and addressed the envelope to

HELEN GRANVILLE.

CHAPTER XVII

MERLIN'S LETTER

HELEN GRANVILLE sat beside the fire in the library at Creekavose. The time was evening and the lights were lit, for the shortest day of the year had come. The villagers had already been practising carols for Christmas, and the committees selected to decorate the Methodist chapel and the parish church had already started to work.

"I wonder whether Merlin will come this Christmas?" mused Helen. "It is such a long time since he went away, nearly three years, and yet I've never seen him through all that time. I think he will come; and oh, I do want to see him! Surely, surely——"

Her father entered the room.

"Well, Helen, sitting all alone?"

"Yes, father."

Mr. Granville walked to and fro the room several times; then he blurted out, "And when is that lad coming to Cornwall, eh?"

During the last few months he had been less bitter towards Merlin. He had ceased to taunt Helen about him, and seemed almost reconciled to the engagement which existed.

"I don't know, father. He hinted about coming in his last letter, but nothing has been settled definitely."

"His last letter—when was that written?"

A look of doubt almost amounting to pain crossed Helen's face.

"A little over a fortnight," she replied, thinking of the short note which came nearly a month before.

"A fortnight, eh? Well, he doesn't waste much time on letter-writing anyhow."

Helen was silent.

"The young beggar is getting on," continued Mr. Granville in a tone of satisfaction. "Have you noticed this in yesterday's *Times*?"

"No. What is it?"

"It is an account of a 'literary dinner' at the Holborn," responded Mr. Granville. "Here is his name, you see; this is how it reads: 'The principal guests of the evening were Viscount Joydale, Sir Arthur Graytown, Mr. Merlin Rosevear,' and so on. Evidently he's moving in good society."

"Yes," responded Helen, thoughtfully.

"Did you notice that article in the *West Briton* the other day?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad the fellow who wrote it said nothing about his having been a miner. That fact may as well die out as far as I can see."

Helen was silent.

"I think I may as well let bygones be bygones, Nell," continued Mr. Granville, presently. "Supposing you write and say we shall be very glad if he'll spend Christmas with us? Or, if you like, I'll write him a line myself."

A look of joy flashed into Helen's eyes at the thought. She had been waiting so long, so anxiously. She had rejoiced in Merlin's success, rejoiced beyond measure. And yet his letters gave her less joy now than when he was struggling for his daily bread. He wrote oftener, too, and was less reserved. But the thought of his being at

Creekavose, where she could see him day by day in her father's house as her accepted lover, drove sad fancies away.

"Thank you so much, father," she said.

"You won't hear of George Newlyn," continued Mr. Granville, "and certainly the fellow does seem to shape well. He will make a decent income in time, too, if he goes on this way."

Just then the front door bell rang.

"That must be the evening post," said Mr. Granville, not noticing the look of anxious expectancy that rested on his daughter's face.

A servant entered with the letters. Mr. Granville took them and scanned them one by one.

"There's only one for you, Helen," he said, "and that's from London. I daresay you recognise the writing," and he threw her the letter carelessly, while he turned to his own correspondence.

Helen's hands trembled as she broke the seal. She saw that it was from Merlin, and for the first time a fear entered her heart lest some calamity should befall. She had waited so long for it, ay, and longed for it too, and wondered why he wrote less frequently as the months went by. Somehow, too, she regarded Merlin differently now from the way she thought of him during the first months of his stay in London. His last book had made him seem a different man. She did not like his "problem novel" nearly as much as "Love-light." She confessed that it was brilliant, some of the situations were powerful, but she could not feel that the hand which penned the book which she had inspired also wrote "The Sin Against Society." The first was written by Merlin as she knew him, while the last was the work of a clever man who was a stranger to her.

She unfolded the paper and commenced to read. Her heart seemed to cease beating as she began to understand

the purport of his words. At first she could not believe her own eyes; she felt that the letter must be a hoax. But by and by the reality of his meaning was forced upon her. Still she was upheld by a strange strength, and she read to the end, and saw the words inscribed,

"Yours sincerely,

"MERLIN ROSEVEAR."

Why had he written in this way? She tried to read the letter a second time but could not. A cold feeling came into her heart, and her hands became nerveless. She lay back in the chair, and a great darkness, like the darkness of the time when she was entombed in the mine, came upon her.

When Mr. Granville had finished reading he turned to his daughter, expecting to find her expectant and joyous, instead of which her face was as pale as death, while every feature was drawn as if with agony.

"Helen!" he cried, "what is the matter?"

But he received no reply. He caught her hands. They were limp and nerveless. Her eyes were open, and seemed to be gazing at some distant object; she was evidently unconscious of his presence.

"Are you ill?" he cried. "What is it, my child?"

But she lay like one in a stupor—nay, rather as one who had received a death-blow.

"Speak, Helen, speak, my child!" He began to chafe her hands and to take other means of arousing her to consciousness.

Presently she sat up, and for a minute or more appeared to be struggling as with some terrible unseen force; then she grew calm.

"I am better now, father," she said, quietly.

"But what's the matter?"

"I'll tell you directly," she said; "wait a minute."

Mr. Granville did not dream of the truth even yet. That Merlin Rosevear, the miner, should even think of breaking his engagement with his daughter never entered his mind.

"Is—is Rosevear dead?" he asked.

"No."

"Ill?"

She shook her head.

"Has anything happened to him?"

She did not reply.

"Tell me, Helen; what is it?"

She hesitated a few seconds, then she placed the letter in her father's hand.

"Read," she said, quietly.

Mr. Granville did not hesitate to obey. He took the crumpled paper nearer the light and read rapidly:—

"DEAR MISS GRANVILLE,—Forgive me for commencing my letter thus, but I feel it is best for me to do so, best for both of us. I can fully see that my motives may be misconstrued, and the step I am taking misunderstood, but to act otherwise would mean misery to us both. Years ago, when we first met, I was an ignorant, ambitious lad. I was unacquainted with the life of the world, and did not know the struggles which lay before me. Thus, in my madness, I aspired to your hand, and asked you to share my lot. That you should promise to do this must ever remain the greatest honour ever bestowed upon me, although you were doubtless influenced by the fact that I had rendered you a service at a critical time. The fact that I was able to do this must remain one of the greatest joys of my life.

"Since I have lived in London, however, a great change has come over my life. Everything appears to me now in a new light. First of all, I have discovered that the labours

of a literary man are but poorly recompensed, so poorly that one in my position has no right to take upon himself the responsibilities of married life. I have also discovered that my daily avocation would ill accord with your tastes and desires. I am become a creature of moods and fancies. Moreover, I have contracted habits which would ill accord with anything like home life. For example, I grow tired of staying in one spot for any length of time, and am constantly roaming from place to place. Next week I go to Paris for a few days, thence to Berlin; and liberty to roam has become a necessity to me. But, besides all this, my ideas concerning life in many of its phases have become so changed that I should be a constant irritation to you. This refers, not to the minor details of life, but to questions which I know you regard as of the highest importance. I need not enlarge on this now, but if you care to read my next book, which will appear early in March, you will understand what I mean. This being the case, I feel it right that I should ask you to release me from the engagement made between us some years ago. Pray do not think this to be a hasty decision of mine. It is not. I have been dimly seeing for more than a year what I have tried to express in this letter, and it causes me more pain than you can think to pen these lines.

"To your father I owe no apologies; he has treated me with scant courtesy. But to you I owe much, and I sincerely trust that I shall cause you no pain by my action. Whatever I am, or wherever I go, I shall regard you as one of the noblest and best women that ever breathed, and to have been associated with you in any way I shall ever regard as the great advantage of life.

"Trusting you will try and understand the feelings which prompt me to write this letter, and believe that I am acting for your truest welfare,—Yours sincerely,

"MERLIN ROSEVEAR."

When Mr. Granville had finished reading, he looked at his daughter half angrily, half tenderly. Bitter, scathing words came to his lips—words that meant curses for Merlin Rosevear, and cruel taunts for his daughter. He had been wounded in his pride. That his daughter, Fortesque Granville's daughter, should be discarded by one who had worked at Besowsa Mine for fifteen shillings a week, and who now was only one of the scores of scribblers who was trying to elbow his way into fame, was to him like the sting of an adder.

He did not utter angry words, however. He came to his daughter and put his arms around her. Forgetting his own pride in the sorrow of his child, he said, lovingly, "Never mind, my Nell; you've got your old dad still. There, lean your head on me, my darling."

Up to this time Helen had felt as if her heart were a cold stone, but at this new revelation of her father's nature the tears began to flow, and although her sobs shook her, she felt as though her burden were lightened.

"Yes, have a good cry, my little lass," he said; "he's not worth it, but it will do you good. That's it, cry, my darling."

It was a new sensation to Helen. For years her father had seemed to show her no affection, no sympathy; and now to rest her head on his shoulder, and be able to confide in him, made the sting of Merlin's letter less keen.

After a time she was able to talk collectedly about the matter and to read the letter again. She was able to read between the lines, too, and to understand what was left unsaid. I will not detail at length here the opinions to which Mr. Granville gave utterance, nor tell how he described the epistle as "miserable trumped-up subterfuge"; that can better be imagined than written down. But he uttered no reproach, nor said an unkind word to Helen. Never before did she feel his love for her as she felt it that night.

For the next two days she remained in the house like one stunned. She seemed incapable of taking any interest in or realising what was transpiring around her. Only one thing did she do, and that was to write to Merlin Rosevear. She in no way tried to show that she understood his letter, or interpreted his motives in writing it. Her note was very short, very simple.

"I have received your letter," she wrote, "and, according to your wish, I release you from all relationships with myself. I take this opportunity of again thanking you for the way you endangered your life in order to save mine, and to express the hope that your future may be useful and happy. On receipt of the letters, etc., with which I have troubled you, I will return everything with which you have honoured me by sending.—I am, sincerely,

HELEN GRANVILLE."

On Christmas Day she went out alone. The air was clear, save for occasional showers of hard, crisp snow. The hills all around were white, and the wind blew keenly. In the village near she heard the villagers singing—

> "Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn
> Whereon the Saviour of mankind was born."

but the carol ill accorded with her feelings. A great blight had fallen on her life. The cold winds that swept across the hills and up the valleys wailed forth a death dirge to her, while the roar of the sea in the near distance contained no music. With steady steps she walked towards the beach, and ere long she reached the spot where, more than three years before, she and Merlin had plighted their troth. Then the glow of an autumn sunset lit up sea and sky, then the

waves sang merrily as they rippled along the beach; now the sky was grey and forbidding, while the backwaves, foam crested, hurled themselves madly on the rock-bound coast.

For hours she stayed there alone, fighting her battle. She had given her love to a man whom she had idealised, and of whom she had thought herself unworthy. She had waited for years in the hope of becoming his wife. In doing this she had braved angry words, scornful reproaches, and refused the sincere love of a man in her own station in life. Now her love was rejected, her ideal was shattered, her god was of clay, and her future was dark. What should she do with her life?

The sharp crystal snowflakes beat upon her, and the sea surged around her feet. She could see no brightness in the sky of her life; her heart seemed cold. But she fought her battle bravely; she did not yield to despair, she did not pray to die, she did not contemplate being swallowed up by the angry waters. God was not dead, but somehow and at some time the clouds would be lifted. She looked out across the foaming sea, and determined, God helping her, to struggle on and make her life worth the living.

Presently the wild winds seemed to give her strength, the roaring sea bade her be brave. Her young rich blood coursed freely through her veins, and hope came into her heart. Hard as it was, this idol of clay must be removed from her life. She must live alone, work alone, fight alone —with God on her side.

But what should she do?

Remain as her father's housekeeper? Cheer and comfort him on dark days—be the sunshine of his life? Yes. She rejoiced in the new tenderness which Merlin's letter had awakened in her father's life, but could she be content to remain there always? Could she live week by week and year by year in the loneliness of Creekavose? Should she

not try and go out into the world, drink its pleasures, and share its triumphs? It seemed impossible.

Possibly George Newlyn might press his claims again, and ask her to be mistress of his stately old home; but her whole nature revolted at the thought. No, she must live alone, work alone.

She went back to her father brave and self-reliant. She had formed no plans for the future, save that she would stay at Creekavose and seek to do her duty. In God's own time He would tell her what to do.

Three months passed away, and Helen Granville had learnt to be cheerful again. She had fought, she had conquered. She found new joy in caring for her father, in attending to the simple duties of her life at home and in the little village. One evening her father laid a copy of the *Times* before her. That paper reached Creekavose late in the afternoon, and Mr. Granville had hastily scanned it before taking his after-dinner nap.

She took it up carelessly, not expecting to find much of interest, but presently her eyes rested on the "Publishers' Column," and she saw the words in bold type, "New Work by Merlin Rosevear." With peculiar interest she read the announcement, and noted the title of the book.

The next day she went to the nearest town and bought a copy. On arriving home, she spent the evening in reading it. She seemed strangely fascinated; perhaps it was because of what Merlin had said concerning it in his letter to her. Long after the rest of the household was asleep Helen sat alone, like one entranced. Whatever interest Merlin's book had aroused elsewhere, it had held her as if by a spell. She did not cease reading until the last page was reached, and then the morning of early spring began to dawn.

But she did not retire to rest, she went to the window

which faced eastward, and looked at the sky which was tinged by the glow of the rising sun. In her eyes a new light was burning, while her hands trembled as if with great excitement. She remained there a long time, her eyes seeming to grow larger and more luminous, her face lit up with the crimson glow of the King of Day.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POPULAR AUTHOR

MERLIN ROSEVEAR'S dreams were fulfilled. He had become popular. Some people used a greater word, and said that he was famous. To the playgoing and novel-reading world his name had become almost a household word. During the two years which followed the time of his writing his fateful letter to Helen Granville, he had poured forth his work with a prodigality which made older men shake their heads, and caused a feeling of envy to come into the hearts of writers of his own age. On every hand, too, he was successful. He had written three plays which had crowded the theatres at which they were performed. He had termed them "Problem Plays," and in them had discussed subjects of a delicate nature. On almost every 'bus in London he saw his name placarded, while the leading papers noticed his work by articles of great length. His dramatic efforts were described as the productions of a bold man, a man who dared to defy Mrs. Grundy. One magazine said that while Mr. Rosevear must be accepted as a force in the world of letters, and while he must be acknowledged as a careful and conscientious worker, it would be as well if the "young person" kept away from his books. Another periodical suggested that while his latest play was a strong and vivid piece of work, besides being "thoroughly convincing," it was not

quite the piece for a father to bring his unsophisticated daughter in her teens to witness.

On the whole, however, the Press spoke very favourably of his work. He was taken seriously. When his last novel was published nearly every leading paper in the country, on the day following its appearance, devoted an article of considerable length, commenting on its unconventionality and on the courage of the author. It is true that certain unsuccessful authors had hinted that the publishers had "arranged with" the editors of the newspapers in order to bring about such a very desirable "chorus" of praise, but that was only to be expected. Men who fail are usually envious of those who succeed, and certainly Merlin had succeeded. His position was higher than even he had dared to hope for; he had been in London just five years, and he was regarded as occupying the front rank among living writers of fiction. His name on a play-bill went far to ensure a crowded audience.

Socially, too, he was among the fortunate ones. No one seemed to remember his humble origin, and he was invited to palatial residences as an honoured guest. People bearing old names spoke freely of "My friend, Merlin Rosevear, the novelist and dramatist," while scarcely a day passed without the postman bringing him evidence that he was a favourite in what is called "society."

As the world knows, too, fame brings money. He had no longer to trouble about a five-pound note; indeed, publishers vied with each other as to which should have the privilege of issuing the novel upon which he was engaged, each seeming to offer better terms than the other, while editors of popular magazines were constantly asking him for contributions, hinting that he might name his own price.

His apartments were now sumptuously furnished, and he

was served in a manner to which Mrs. Blindy was an entire stranger. Indeed, that time when Mrs. Blindy expatiated on her liver, and told what she did before "'Arry took to slummin' for the Awmy," seemed a long way off. His clothes were no longer threadbare; indeed, his Bond Street tailor assured him that "there wasn't a better dressed gentleman in London." Altogether Merlin Rosevear was a success. He did not visit Cornwall, but he wrote home at intervals, and sent considerable sums of money to his mother. His communications always brought joy to his mother's heart, although, as she said, "she'd rather a thousand times see 'er clever booy than have his money."

One evening in February Merlin was sitting alone. This was a somewhat unusual circumstance; mostly he worked of a morning, and spent his evenings either at some place of amusement, his club, or "in society." On this occasion, however, he had refused all invitations, preferring to be alone. The reason was this: it was the anniversary of his coming to London. Five years that very day he had left St. Endor, and had come to conquer the metropolis. He told himself that his sentimental feelings had gone, but something which he could not explain made him desire to be alone that night.

He did not try to work; indeed, he did not feel in the humour for it. Besides, there was no pressing need just then. Editors must wait; he couldn't be bothered.

He took an expensive cigar from a box and began to smoke. Laying back in a huge armchair, and resting his legs on another, he looked the picture of comfort. He was, as was usually conceded, a handsome, distinguished-looking man, although he certainly looked more than five years older than when he came to London. After all, a literary life meant much careful thought and a great deal of

hard work. The rosy flush on his cheeks was gone, and the marks around his eyes and the lines near his mouth were very distinct. There was an expression of weariness in his face now, as though realisation were not so sweet as anticipation, and sometimes he sighed as though something lay heavily on his heart. He looked quite thirty, perhaps a little more, while actually he was years younger than that. Still there was nothing thin or emaciated about his appearance, and many struggling young authors called him a "lucky beggar," and wished that fortune had favoured them similarly.

"Five years," he mused, "five years, and—well, I suppose I've done it. I'm young, and, as I said to Gregory, I've got my popularity while I can enjoy it. Come in."

The last remark was addressed to some one who knocked at the door, and in response to his words a servant entered with a number of letters. There was no expectancy in his eyes as he took them. Letters were very plentiful, too plentiful. He took them one after another, and after hastily skimming them threw them aside. Some contained invitations to a "quiet evening"; others were from gushing young ladies asking for his autograph; two were from struggling young authors, asking whether he would read their MS.; one was from an editor asking for a contribution.

He took the editor's letter and placed it by itself. "It may be worth while," he thought. Then he turned to the notes from the struggling authors. They were asking him in his prosperity to do what he in his adversity would have liked to have asked from popular men.

"Poor beggars," he said, "it's jolly hard for them, but really I've no time, and—well, I'm sick of copy, and that's the truth. I'll suggest that they try a paid literary adviser."

He picked up the last letter in the pile as yet unopened.

"From Quill and Steel," he mused, "it's bulky, too. Oh, I see, it's their account—let's see how the books are going."

He opened the sheet of ruled foolscap, and read carefully.

"Sold between July 1st and December 31st," he read, and then followed the figures. "It's very strange," he said at length, "very strange. 'Lovelight' has been out several years, and yet it is selling more rapidly than my later and stronger books. What is the meaning of it? Why, it has actually gone by five copies to one more than my great work—the work by which I hoped to startle the reading world. I mentioned it, I remember, in my last letter to Helen Granville, and referred her to it as explaining my change of views. Some of the critics said it would revolutionise society; but it hasn't. Its sale has been small, while that of 'Lovelight' increases. Yes, it heads the list even to-day. And yet it's crude and silly. What a lot of humbug I put into it! First and only love, an immaculate hero—as though one ever existed!—and a pure, artless girl, one without a past, which is sheer nonsense. There's no analysis, no revelation of the follies and weakness of nature, no cynical, biting epigrams, no hint at a true knowledge of life. And yet it's selling by thousands. Let me see, when did I write it? Ah, yes, of course. My word, what a time it was! It was Helen's letter that started it. I remember I was starving, and MacFarlane gave me a dinner; then I came back and found Helen's letter and a postal order. Yes, 'Lovelight' came to me like a flash. It was like inspiration. Strange, undefined yearnings found expression, hazy dreams became realities. The story was not a study, but a love song, a

sort of Arcadian Idyll, and I wrote it easily and quickly. I can't write like that now. Why is it? My stories come slowly, and have to be carefully planned by slow degrees. I never get such flashes now; I never write at white heat. Why, I remember crying over my heroine in 'Lovelight,' and forgot my own troubles in the trouble of the hero. Now I'm not moved in any way. All my passion is carefully arranged. In fact, ever since I began to think about giving up Hel——"

He started to his feet and commenced pacing the room. "It's five years to-night since I came to London," he mused—"five years. Five years last night I bade her good-bye; we walked the beach together while the sea roared and foamed, and we vowed to love each other for ever. What fools! But she was true to her word; I'm sure that she kept faithful to me. I wonder how she received that letter? It's more than two years now since I sent it, and I've had no line from her since that note setting me free! But she was a grand girl after all. How well I remember the first time I saw her and what I felt; ay, and the mine accident afterwards. By Jove, I was an enthusiast then! I sent back everything save her photograph and the letter which inspired 'Lovelight'; I couldn't make up my mind to part with them."

He went to his desk and took therefrom a photograph and a letter. He looked long on the former, and his lips moved nervously.

"Ah, but she was a beautiful girl," he cried, "and honest as the day. She must have sacrificed something to choose me in those days. Still there's——"

He threw down the photograph and began reading the letter. Try as he would, he could not quite keep the tears from his eyes as he read. The words held him as by a strange power, the words which helped and inspired him

long years before, when he was starving in a garret. He read the concluding lines again and again.

"I am afraid you are not succeeding as you hoped, Merlin. Never mind, the brighter days are surely coming. Never did my heart tell me as now that you will overcome all your difficulties. I am always thinking about you, Merlin, always making plans for us both, always praying for you, always loving you.

"Father is as little reconciled to my choice as ever; but I cannot help his anger. Rich or poor, famous or obscure, I am yours, Merlin. I believe in you, my own."

And he had given her up! Had he done right?

"Yes," he cried, "I did right. I am silly and sentimental to-night. What could I do with a girl like Helen as my wife? She would be a constant irritation to me. She is poor, too, and I can't afford to be bothered with a poor wife. Besides, I couldn't stand Granville, neither could I stand Helen's puritanical ideas. I wanted to get on, and so I laid aside every weight. And I have got on. I make, yes, I make—" he looked at his publishers' account —"yes, I make a tidy income. Besides, Helen stood in the way of—well, lots of things. There, I've let my cigar go out. I'll light up."

He lit his cigar and lay back in the chair.

"It's a risky thing is getting married," he mused, "a risky thing. But she's rich, she's clever, she's fascinating, and her father has more influence on the Press than any living man. I can't afford to offend him even yet. No doubt I owe very much to him, and I must make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. I almost feel afraid of her, too. I wonder if she's as rich as reported, and—and I wonder why she was down by the river that night

when I first saw her. I believe she expects me to marry her, and—well, what woman of society hasn't a past?"

His face grew hard, and he looked as though he were making a calculation. The fire began to burn low in the grate, and he threw on more coals. Then he sat for a long time looking steadfastly into the brightening flames.

"My popularity may not last," he said at length. "There's no knowing. Take Richard Beswick. Fifteen years ago he was better off than I am—ay, and more popular. Why, that book of his, 'Heaven and Earth,' sold between four and five thousand in the three-volume form among the libraries, and now I suppose the poor beggar has scarcely a choice of publishers. Then people swore by him; now—well, he's nobody. A fellow must prepare for the future, and I couldn't stand being poor again."

Presently a knock came to the door again.

"What, more letters, Mary?" said Merlin to the servant who entered.

"It's the last post, sir, and only one this time, sir." The girl placed the letter before him, and left the room noiselessly.

"It's a private letter from Quill," he said, eagerly, as he broke the seal; "I wonder what he has to say."

He read the letter through very carefully and with a clouded brow; then, as if not satisfied, he re-read it. After this he turned to the "account" which came to him by the earlier post, and examined it with great attention.

"I did not notice it before, but it is so," he cried; "the last book being new, and which should have had the biggest sale, has done worse than any. What does Quill say?"

He turned again to the letter and read the publisher's words:

"You will, of course, be disappointed, as we are, that the

sales of your last book have not come up to the others. We are the more disappointed because we expected more from it, and spent a large amount in advertisements. Our travellers tell us that booksellers do not order your books as freely as they did a year ago. Readers complain that they are cynical and hopeless, while it has been more than once hinted that certain situations in your two last novels make parents hesitate about allowing them to be freely read by young people. However, that cuts both ways, as you know, and we simply state facts, as we think you would like to know them. We sincerely hope that the book we are to publish for you next month will cause a sensation, and to this end we are arranging for the work to be widely noticed by the Press; in other words, we are doing our best to 'boom' it prior to its appearance."

For half an hour after this Merlin paced the room. Sometimes he seemed angry, at others he appeared cool and calculating. Presently, however, his solitude was again broken.

"A lady to see you, sir," said the servant, placing a card before him.

"Mrs. Telford!" he exclaimed on looking at it. "Show her up at once, Mary."

A minute later Mrs. Telford stood at the open door, while Merlin welcomed her with apparent eagerness and delight.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. TELFORD

"THIS is an honour," exclaimed Merlin, as he helped Mrs. Telford to take off her heavy fur-lined cloak.

"I am glad you think so," replied that lady, with a laugh. "It is as cold as death outside, and the streets are so slippery that the cabby had to drive slowly; I believe I should have got here quicker by walking."

"It is delightful of you to come, anyhow," cried Merlin, as he poked the fire and rang for more coals. "I expected to be left quite alone to-night; I refused all invitations to go out, even when Jack Brooks asked me to go to the 'first night' at the —— I refused."

"Yes; I know you did. Don't you remember I was standing near you when you spoke to him."

"Oh, yes, of course, I remember."

"You were very positive, I remember, in saying you wanted the evening alone; so positive that I hesitated about coming. I hope I am not in the way."

"Oh, no. I shall, as you know, always be glad to see you! Why, this is the first time I have ever had the honour of a visit from you in this way."

"Yes; I have never ventured on your lonely domain before. It required a little courage." And she laughed.

"It should not need courage on *your* part to come here, Mrs. Telford."

"I thought you knew my name."

"Thank you for reminding me. Kitty, then."

"That's better, Merlin. But why were you so anxious to be alone to-night. I see no copy anywhere. What have you been doing?"

"Dreaming."

"Very bad for you."

"Perhaps it is. Have a cigarette?"

"Thank you."

He opened a box of cigarettes and passed it to her. She took one, and, lighting it carefully with the match he held for her, began to smoke tranquilly.

"What have you been dreaming about?"

"You."

"And the dream has been——"

"Beautiful."

"Anything else?"

"Well, I've been thinking about the past. It is five years to-day since I came to London."

"I should think you were a nice lad before you came."

"Very green, very unsophisticated, very trustful, very good."

"Well, you are very good now."

"Thank you."

"Yes, I think you are. I am older than you, and I think I may speak with something like authority. I have come into contact with literary men for many years, and I know none so careful, so prudent as you."

"You are wondrously kind. What higher tribute can I need?"

"We've been friends now for a long time. How long is it?"

"Oh, years. Four years I think. I had been here only one year, I believe, when first I—I——"

"You needn't hesitate. When first you saw me down by

the river. It was close by Temple Pier. I remember very well. The tide was high, too."

"What had the tide to do with it?"

"I was about to commit suicide.'

"Suicide! You?"

"Yes."

Her face had become hard, her features moveless like those of a carved statue. She looked years older now than when she entered. Her skin had become gray and dull, her hands were clenched.

"I've made up my mind to tell you, Merlin; that's why I have invaded your domain to-night. I wanted to tell you why I was going to end my life, and how you saved me. How old are you?"

"Not thirty yet."

"No? I am, I'm thirty-three. A woman is older than a man by five years, naturally, even when she counts only the same number of years. Between seventeen and twenty-two a woman lives ten years. At least she does in London. That's why a girl of twenty-two is always as old as a man of twenty-seven. By that I mean London girls, who live among the class of people with whom I have always been brought into contact. I don't know anything about country girls, except those whose fathers and mothers bring them to London—to spend a part of their time. Somehow they are infected with the same disease. Thus it is, those who ought to be girls of twenty-two are women, women of twenty-seven. I wish I knew some woman of twenty-seven who was only a girl of twenty-two. It would make life—different."

"Aren't you talking a little strange?"

"Am I? I didn't know. I expect all this formed a kind of prelude to what I wanted to say to you."

"Yes."

"I have never been young, myself."

"Excuse me, you are young now, young and beautiful."

"Yes, I've heard it before. I feel to-night as though it might be possible—even now."

"Of course."

"And yet I feel so old, so very, very old."

"Impossible."

"You are very polite. You say what the world says. I wish you would be honest. I wish you would help me to be young."

There was a look almost amounting to insanity in her eyes, but she went on, speaking calmly. "I was a long time before I could persuade myself to come and speak to you to-night. But we have been friends for years; you have visited my father's house often, and my father looks on you with great kindness. He says that book of yours, 'Lovelight,' is as pure as dew, that it's just like a spring morning. It's not nearly as clever, he thinks, as your later ones, and gives evidence of immeasurable ignorance and foolishness, but he talks about it more than he does about your clever ones. He says that it indicates a good heart, a heart free from sordid ambitions."

A cloud passed across Merlin's brow.

"Do you know," she went on, "I have a feeling that in that book you spoke your true life. These later ones and the plays are but the hollow echo of the miserable twaddle of the age. I have become weary of it. I've heard it ever since I left school. It seems as though we've been willing to shape our ethical codes according to our miserable desires. More than that, we've been willing to lower our ideals in order to get a public to read our books, and to swim with the tide."

"Are you not condemning yourself? Remember 'Hymen.'"

"That's why I feel so old. I want to be young. I do so want to be young, and to know what the birds mean when they sing, and what the flowers mean when they bloom, just as children seem to know. You must have been very happy when you wrote 'Lovelight.'"

"I was starving."

She nodded.

"I lived, I remember, for three weeks on a postal order for twenty shillings. Out of that sum I paid twelve shillings for rent and one shilling for washing, leaving me seven shillings for food."

"But you must have been young while you wrote—you must have felt so young."

"Yes, I did."

"Although you were starving?"

"Yes."

"Was it about that time you first saw me?"

"No; it was after. The book had been completed then and published."

"Yes?"

"It was a failure, too. That night when I saw you I had been to my first public dinner. It was a club dinner. I went as the guest of Vivian Gregory. Jones was the guest of the evening—you know him. I was nobody, and I had walked to London Bridge afterwards. I was excited and could not rest; I was wondering if I should ever be successful, and I was trying to think of means whereby I could be what I hoped to be. Coming along the Embankment—I saw—you."

"I've been reading your book to-day," she said; "I mean 'Lovelight.' It made me wish you had never written another, or if you had that you had again caught the spirit of that story. It made me feel that you were a good man; it made me glad that in spite of your success you have not

become the fast man about town. That's why I've come to tell you my story."

"Yes? But then I'm not——"

"Don't say that; let me tell you that which explains what you saw that night. I told you, didn't I, that I had never felt young? There is but little wonder. My mother died when I was a baby, and my father has always been engrossed in his books, and all his interest in me was that I should become a second George Eliot. When I was about five he secured me a governess. She was a woman about forty-five. She was 'literary and scientific.' She was, as I have heard my father say since, free from all notions of conventional religion and morality. She was a woman of strong mind, and an advanced thinker."

There was bitter scorn in Mrs. Telford's voice as she spoke of this part of her life.

"After my education was completed I was left pretty much to my own will. My father introduced me to literary circles; I became influenced by the talk of these people, many of whom were clever and cynical.

"At this time my father aroused my ambition in two ways. First, he made me determine to write clever, daring books, and then he made me feel the necessity of marrying well. Thanks to his position, I never had any difficulty in finding a publisher for my books, and never needed favourable criticisms after they were written. I don't think I was a bad girl; I am sure I was not. It is true I have never known anything about a strict code of morality, as puritanical country girls know it; but I was right at heart, I am sure. In time I was introduced to Mr. Telford; he had been married twice, and was just left a widower. He was very rich, and seemed very fond of me. He was anxious that I should marry him. I never had any romantic ideas about marriage; early in life I had been led to regard

'love's young dream' as utter foolishness. Well, I married him. I found that he was a narrow, sordid man, a bad man, too. He is dead, so I need say no more about him, except that he was terribly jealous. My life became a terror. Away in his great country house, seeing no company, I was forced to think and to dream, to dream of what might have been. Then I hated myself for allowing myself to be sold for this man's money-bags. I hated the luxuries his wealth bought. All the time I had to wear a mask; I had to appear before this man as though I was happy. I was under promise to my father that I would make Mr. Telford believe I cared for him.

"We came to London and stayed at the —— Hotel, you know. One night Mr. Telford was to be engaged with some City magnate. So I told him I would go and see an old friend of mine, and that probably we should go to some place of amusement. He objected, and said he wished me to remain at the hotel. I told him that I should use my own judgment. Then he insulted me. I need not go into the sordid details which followed. We stayed at the hotel for several days, and quarrel succeeded quarrel. On the night that we met I had gone to see my father, and had told him my story. He, remembering Mr. Telford's money, I suppose, refused my plea to come home, and spoke harshly to me. As I left my father's house life seemed unbearable. My so-called husband, although so much older than I, might live for years, many years, and he was strong and brutal. A score of plans came into my mind, and finally I made up my mind that I would end my life. That was why I was by the river that night. There is no tragedy in my story save the tragedy of a loveless life, of unsatisfied yearnings, of hopeless misery. But all this has made me old, bitter. When I saw your face, however, I caught a glimpse of a better life. You were

young and hopeful. You were not a fast man about town; you spoke considerately, kindly. Although you did not know it, you gave me hope. I said then that probably we should never meet again, yet I hoped we should. That is the bare outline of my story; of the utter misery of being wedded to such a man as Mr. Telford, of being jealously watched over by him, of having to suffer his presence day by day, it is impossible for you to realise. I wonder I did not go to the bad, or else go mad, but something kept me."

She told her story calmly, with scarcely a spark of passion, yet she was evidently sincere.

Merlin sat a few minutes as if calculating, then he said, "But you called me a Mr. —— at the hotel door. Does any one bearing that name exist?"

"Yes. He was a favourite nephew of Mr. Telford's. I had to arrange with him afterwards to manufacture a story to tell my—husband."

Again Merlin was thoughtful a few minutes, then he spoke again.

"And were you—you friends with your husband—when —when he died?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; I yielded to my father's desires. I flattered my husband's vanity. I made up my mind that I would get his money. And I got it too, that is, he left me a large sum—more than I shall ever need."

Merlin's eyes brightened. He seemed to be debating with himself.

"It is kind of you to tell me this," he said presently.

"I wanted to tell you why I was standing by the embankment that night," she replied, simply, "and I have related the rest of my story because you have given me hope in life. I have been reading 'Lovelight' to-day, and it has made me feel that I am not old, and that I may know something of the joys of life. The book has made me

want to trust you too, it has made me feel that you are a good man."

The hard look had gone from her face, she looked a young, beautiful woman. An expression of infinite longing was in her eyes.

"I am glad you have told me this, Kitty," he said at length, "glad that you trust me. As you say we have been friends for years, I am delighted that at last you trust me enough to tell me your story."

"I was afraid lest you should think evil about me," she said. "I have wanted to tell you for a long time, but I could not make up my mind. No one wants to be thought worse than they really are, and my worst sin is that I married a man for his money, a man whom I despised. I have lived this artificial life so long that it has done me good to be honest and truthful."

"When I wrote 'Lovelight'," replied Merlin, "I was in love with an unsophisticated green country girl."

"Yes," she said eagerly, "and now?"

"I have not seen her for five years."

"Five years?"

"Yes; five years last night I parted from her. Five years to-night I arrived in London."

"And why did you give her up? Or perhaps she grew tired of you?"

"No, I gave her up, or rather I asked her to release me."

"Was she good—pure?"

"Yes."

"And you loved her?"

"I suppose so—once."

"Then why did you cease to care for her?"

"She was—unfitted for me. Anyhow I grew unfitted for her."

She looked at him steadily.

"That night on which I first spoke to you, I mean that night when we were introduced—you remember—was the time when I felt I could never make her my wife."

"How was that?"

"I felt that her world was not mine, that I wanted to enter the world in which you lived, and that she could never come there."

They talked a few minutes longer, then Mrs. Telford took her leave. When she was gone, Merlin Rosevear compared the faces of Helen Granville and Mrs. Telford, as they were revealed to him by a photographer's art. For a time he seemed to be in doubt as to some problem he was trying to solve. Presently, however, a look of decision came into his eyes, as though he had made up his mind.

CHAPTER XX

BACHELOR NO LONGER

"WELL, Rosevear, it is an age since I saw you. You don't seem to have time to have a chat with your old chums."

It was Vivian Gregory who spoke, and this time they met in Merlin's rooms.

"Yes, I've been very busy," replied the successful author. "Editors have been bothering me for work, and I've hardly been able to call my soul my own. Besides, I don't work as easily as I did. I suppose it is because I am more particular than I was. You see those fellows pay me big prices, and I naturally want to turn out good work."

"At any rate you have your revenge now," laughed Gregory. "Years ago editors bothered you the other way. You have made big strides, my dear boy."

"I suppose so."

"Suppose so! Why, Merlin Rosevear's name is everywhere. You cannot pick up a paper anywhere without seeing it. I saw it mentioned the other day that you were making among the biggest incomes of any of the literary men of our times. No magazine of note seems to be complete unless it has something from your pen."

"I suppose some penny-a-liner had to fill up a column somehow, so he invented something which he thought

would interest," replied Merlin. "I wish people would leave me and my income alone."

"Popularity, my boy—that's what it means. I never see Vivian Gregory's name knocking about that way."

"Well, don't be jealous, Gregory."

"No; I'm not jealous. You worked for popularity and you've got it. I have not troubled about it, and I still toil along practically unknown."

"Nay, not so bad as that."

"Well, perhaps not quite so bad as that. My books are increasing in circulation, but, of course, compared with yours they are nowhere. But what is this I heard the other day about your getting married? Is it true?"

"Probably."

"To Mrs. Telford?"

"Yes."

"Then you've broken with Miss Granville?"

"More than two years ago."

"What! Never!"

"Yes. You see it was not a matter I cared talking about. It was my own business, and I saw no necessity for it to become public. Then, of course, Miss Granville has no friends here—in our circle—and as you don't go to Cornwall, you have, of course, heard nothing about it. It's true for all that."

"Then she gave you up?"

"Oh dear no; that is, not until I asked her."

"And do you mean to say that you asked such a girl as Miss Granville, after she had suffered as she had suffered for you, to give you up?"

"I thought it best, I thought it right, Gregory. Miss Granville was unfitted for such a life as mine. I felt there was a gulf between us. She could never conform to the ways and thoughts which—which I had come to believe in."

"And you—you gave her up for this Mrs. Telford?"

"Be careful what you say, Gregory. Mrs. Telford will be my wife shortly."

"I wish to say nothing wrong, old man. I was only wondering—that is all."

For a few minutes both were silent, while Gregory paced up and down the room.

"I am older than you," said Gregory, at length.

"Yes, older, three or four years, I suppose; not enough to warrant your preaching, though."

Gregory gave Merlin a keen, searching look, then he said, quietly: "I remember you came to me, down in Cornwall, for advice. Let me see, it's going on six years ago. You were different then, Rosevear."

"Yes, I came to you. You were very kind, I remember. Don't think I forget past favours, Gregory."

There was a sneer in his voice as he gave expression to the last remark, but the young man took no heed.

"Do you think you are as good a fellow as you were then?" he said.

Merlin winced. "I say, old chap, don't come to a chap's diggings to dissect him," he said, testily.

"I'll admit it seems a bit priggish of me," he said; "I suppose lots of people would call me a prig, although heaven knows I hate the thought of being one. Lots of fellows seem to label every man as a prig who remembers his boyish dreams; and to be honest, I must confess to having the remains of an old conscience somewhere in my being, and I'm not ashamed to own it. I have a lingering fondness for my old dreams and ideals, too; in fact, I can't give them up."

"Very kind of you to tell me this," replied Merlin. "I see the point of your remarks, too; I'm not so dense as all that. And since you seem so interested in me, I'll make

a further confession. The cap you have made fits me to a nicety. I have given up my old dreams—at least, many of them. Why? Well, because I found out how much they were worth. Life is short, my dear boy, and this is the only world there is any certainty about, so—well, I'm determined to make the most of it. But what do you mean by all this? You want to preach to me, I suppose. Well, preach."

"Merlin, my boy," said Gregory, "have you ever thought of this truth: The quality of a man's work depends on the quality of the man. Not the mental quality so much as that finer quality of the man's soul-life, or whatever you like to call it. It seems to me that the great thing a novelist wants is what I will call, for want of a better term, *intuition*. He wants to feel much, to be conscious of what he can't reason out. His brain needs to be the servant of his soul, because it's the soul that receives impressions and inspires the mind. When the soul is sensitive, there is never a lack of poetical conceptions, never a lack of fine ideas, providing, of course, that a man has the root of the novelist's power in him."

"That's very fine," laughed Merlin; "I shall expect great things of you. But why this homily to me?"

"Because, old chap, you will excuse me for saying so, but while your mind is growing your soul is dying."

"I don't see that my work deteriorates," replied Merlin, sharply.

"But I do, Merlin. Technically this last thing of yours (it came out last week, you know) is miles ahead of 'Lovelight,' and yet your firstborn will live long after this thing of yours is forgotten. Your problem novel has no real passion in it; there—there is no—no *vision* in it, if you will excuse me for saying so."

"Thank you."

"Yes, I know I seem a conceited, interfering, bombastic prig. But I say it in all kindness, Rosevear, even though I have not, from the popularity standpoint, earned the right to speak. Mentally speaking, you are miles above me. You have qualities in you which, truly developed, would give you an almost undying name. I am a mediocre chap mentally; I have dreams and fancies, but I lack the mental power to work them out. If I had your brains — your technique shall I call it?—I could do good work, ay, work that would live. But, forgive me, you are losing the power you had."

"Why? How?"

"Because you have pandered, old chap. You have lived for results of work rather than for the work itself. You have had your eye all the time on fame, popularity, publishers' cheques, and all that, and these things have been blinding you to the realities beyond. And your work is poorer than it was. You have gained notice by sayings which are clever and daring, you have been willing to get neck-deep in risky morals, you have sneered at the things which your mother regards as sacred."

"My mother! What does she know about literature?"

"Little from your standpoint, perhaps nothing. Perhaps, too, the Prophet Isaiah or the writer of the Book of Job would be ignorant of literature from your standpoint."

"Well, have you finished, Gregory? You have, I trust, unburdened your precious soul, and, as Cornish local preachers used to say, 'declared the whole counsel.' Are you satisfied?"

"I'm afraid I've made you think——"

"Oh, no; you've given me some orthodox doctrine. I fancy you must have been spending your Sundays at some revival meeting-house. I think you must have been under conviction and got converted. We shall see you a popular

Nonconformist minister soon, or, perhaps, a frocked curate. I thought I detected a bit of ecclesiastical sing-song in that voice of yours. But I'm a hardened sinner, old man. I'm not under conviction, and I don't want to get converted. There now; here's a cigar, let's have another smoke, and let morals go where they came from. I don't know of any worth troubling about."

"Very well, Merlin. I'm a blithering idiot, perhaps, and —and—well, I've said enough."

During the time they remained together after this, they talked on commonplace topics; but, after Gregory had gone, Merlin Rosevear sat for a long time thinking. The next evening, however, he was the guest of the evening at a literary club dinner, and then he was able to laugh at Gregory's opinions.

A few weeks later he dropped in to see his publishers.

"Well, and how is the book trade?" he asked, presently.

"The world needs a sensation," remarked Mr. Quill.

"What do you mean?"

"Books are issued by the shoal, and unless a writer has something very special to say his work falls flat."

"That means that my last has not gone well."

"Oh, fairly well."

"It was well reviewed."

"Oh, yes; that part of the business was done all right. But it has created no sensation. It just moves quietly."

"And yet I thought it would make a hit."

"Well, two things seem to make a book go. It must either be a book of *exceptional ability*, or a book of exceptional—well, call it *daring*. Novel readers need something special to titillate their jaded palates. This last book of yours is very good, but it advances no ideas of morals not hitherto advanced, it touches no social proprieties or improprieties hitherto left untouched, it is simply a strong,

clever novel which follows in the wake of half a score of our modern writers. As I said, the novel-reading world wants a new sensation, and the man who will create it will at the same time make his fortune."

"And his publisher's."

"Oh, of course," and Mr. Quill laughed.

Merlin left the publishing house in a very thoughtful mood, and after going to his club for an hour, he came back to his rooms.

"I feel no enthusiasm about writing," he said, wearily; "I never write at white-heat now, and yet I am not thirty years of age. Plots used to come to me wholesale—they don't now. Besides, even when I conceive a new idea, I never get enthusiastic about it. I feel the truth of what Quill says. What is wanted is a book to arouse people, to stir their pulses, ay, and work upon their passions if need be. But somehow I'm so jolly weary of the whole thing. I don't realise any great joy now, my heart doesn't respond to my ideas. I expect I am a bit overworked. I'll have a holiday, and come back refreshed."

He lay back in his chair a few minutes, then he started up suddenly.

"I'll go and see Kitty," he said. "I'll suggest that we get married at once. I don't understand the change coming over her—I wonder what she means about being young again? Well, I do believe she's fond of me, and I really believe I would rather be fastened to her than to any living woman—except—— Hang it! Why am I always thinking about Helen? My love is all gone from her; I had to stifle it. She would not do for my wife. No, I'll go and see Kitty right away. I'll arrange to get married at once; there'll be little or no romance about it, we've both got over that. Still, I think it is a necessary step to take, and then when I come back I'll write a book that shall take

the world by storm. I will, by Heaven I will! Gregory says I am losing power, does he? Well, I'll let him know; I'll give the parsons something to preach about, and the paper fellows something to write about!"

He stalked to and fro in the room like a man in a rage.

"The fellow talks like a parson; he talks about morals as though a man could be tied down to any particular set of morals. The Chinaman has one set, the Hindoo has another, those Cornish miners have another, and we here in London have another. And yet——"

He left the room hurriedly, and having got into the street hailed a cab. A few minutes later he was met by Mrs. Telford, who gave him a warm welcome.

"You look ill, worried, Merlin," she said.

"Do I?"

"Yes, what is the matter?"

"I've been working too hard, I think."

"Then you must go away and rest."

"Yes, I must. Will you go with me?"

"You mean——?"

"That we shall get married at once, Kitty; that we shall go away to some place—I don't care much where, but away from reviews, and literary coteries and crowds."

"To Cornwall, for example; that would be fine."

"No, not to Cornwall; I couldn't stand that. Let's go where English isn't spoken."

"All right; away to Germany on the banks of the Rhine, or to the Pyrenees. We can be quiet there, and shall hear nothing of scandals or problem novels. Life will be young there."

"Do you object to problem novels then? You are changed very much."

"I object to everything just now which destroys the impression which your 'Lovelight' has made upon me."

"You have not read my new book then?"

"No, I've been reading 'John Halifax' instead. I'm positively satiated with the society novel; I am weary with this wholesale destruction of simple Christian morals. I do so want to get a little faith. And you will help me, Merlin, won't you? You will help me to experience what, as a young girl, I never experienced?"

"I'll try, Kitty," he said, while a curious light shone from his eyes.

"I wish I could burn every copy of that book of mine which I called 'Hymen.'"

"It is rather strong."

"It is abominable. But we have a future, haven't we? In the long days to come I'll try and enter into another life. With you by my side I am sure I shall be able."

"I wonder what has come over her?" he mused, as he walked away from the house. "I really can't stand much of this kind of thing. I wonder now——?" He stopped as though a doubt had come into his mind, "I'll know before I buy the licence," he muttered between his set teeth; "Bray will tell me, I am sure, and he has the management of her business."

The next morning Merlin visited a well-known firm of lawyers, and after a short interview with the senior partner left with a smiling face.

"Better than I dared to hope," he said to himself. "Yes, the sooner the affair is settled the more I shall be pleased."

A fortnight later Mr. and Mrs. Rosevear were on their way to the Continent for their honeymoon, he smiling and seemingly contented, she with a strange look of longing and hope in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

MERLIN'S "GREAT" BOOK AND ANOTHER

WHEN Merlin came back from his honeymoon he commenced writing his great book, for he had determined that it should be great. Nothing he had hitherto done should come within measureable distance of it. It should be the work by which his name should be handed down to history, and it should set England talking. He planned it with great care, for he was anxious that the structure of the story should be without flaw. He also read a large number of books in order to be able to write with confidence on certain disputed questions. He visited churches of various orders; he studied their different beliefs. He was often seen at the Law Courts, and he was noticed to pay great attention to cases which seemed to illustrate the condition of certain sections of society. He also paid a visit to Captain Harry Blindy, of the Salvation Army, and asked him to teach him the art of "slumming."

When he arrived at his old lodgings he received an enthusiastic welcome from his former landlady.

"If yer wants to learn slummin', Mr. Rosevear," said that lady, "'Arry's yer man. I calls 'im the most vallyable man in the Awmy, an' I means to tell the General so at the first fivorable opporchunity. If you axes me, I should say that the Awmy owes a great deal of its success to 'Arry, and, although I oughtn't to say it, the fact that I was

brought up a lidy hev hed a good effect upon the Awmy, seein' as 'ow the Awmy people mostly belongs to the lower horders. Thet's what I've got to tell the General, Mr. Rosevear, when a fivorable opporchunity occurs."

"That is doubtless true, Mrs. Blindy," replied Merlin; "that is why I came to him. Come, Captain, are you ready?"

"We'll have a word of prayer, Mr. Rosevear, and then, bless the Lord, I'm ready."

He accordingly knelt down, and offered up a fervent prayer for guidance and help. None who saw him could doubt his sincerity, or the earnest purposes of his heart. Whatever Merlin might think of him, the man's religion was real to him, and he had no more doubt about the truth of Salvation Army doctrines than he had about his own existence.

"Well, how are you, Mr. Rosevear?" he asked after they had gone some distance eastward.

"Pretty well, Captain. How are you?"

"Nicely saved, bless the Lord," said the Captain, fervently.

That night the Captain led Merlin into strange places, and the young man saw peculiar sights—sights which remained in his memory for many a long day.

"It was an unpleasant experience," mused Merlin the following morning, "but it has given me some fair copy; I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I shall be able to work it up into a fine realistic chapter."

Presently paragraphs appeared in the papers stating that Mr. Merlin Rosevear was engaged on a work that would cause a sensation in the reading world. Later, further notes were issued to the effect that while Mr. Rosevear had only recently started writing this new work, the main theories he would advance had been in his mind for years. Later still

information was given that the popular author's theories would be substantiated by facts which had caused much controversy at the time they had taken place, and while he anticipated much opposition, and possibly abuse when the book appeared, fidelity to truth demanded plain statements.

Just before the book appeared an interview appeared in a popular paper, which interview was widely quoted. This contained, among other items of interest, a letter from the publishers to the author, telling him that, owing to the unprecedented orders for the book, the first edition, published at six shillings, would consist of 25,000 copies.

Certainly if the taste of the British public could be whetted by puffing notices, Merlin's book would be eagerly bought by crowds everywhere.

The last paragraph which went the round of the papers was to the effect that, after much care in selecting the title, Mr. Rosevear had at last decided on "The Failure of David's Son."

The book was widely advertised, and when it came out was much talked about. The first review that appeared described it as "the boldest book of the century"; the second spoke of it as "sublimely daring, but only daring enough to tell the truth."

A week later it was reported that Mudie had refused to take a single volume, and the following day a leading newspaper contained an interview with the manager of Smith's library, who, while admitting the work to be of great cleverness, did not think he would be justified in accepting it. As a reason for this he went on to say that theirs was to a large extent a family library, and he did not regard Mr. Rosevear's novel as quite suited for family reading.

This was followed by much correspondence. The daily papers teemed with letters. Some spoke of the novel as a

sublime work of art, as eminently pure, and the product of an honest man. Others, again, described it as "a cesspool novel," and as an insult to our national morality. Many criticised the libraries most severely for boycotting it; those of a different opinion thanked the managers for uttering their protest against a vile production.

Judging from the correspondence the book was at the same time eminently pure and sordidly corrupt, a book that ought to be read in the interests of morality, and at the same time to be avoided as a pestilence.

All this, however, had the effect of creating a great demand for "The Failure of David's Son." It sold in thousands. It was the talk of reading circles everywhere, and the name of Merlin Rosevear passed from lip to lip freely. Never in his most sanguine moments did Merlin calculate upon such a victory. The leading papers, while they might disagree with the sentiments of the novel, spoke of it as the work of a master. Booksellers declared that never in their experience had a book sold so freely.

And yet Merlin was not altogether satisfied. The enormous sales did not bring him that satisfaction he expected, and spite of hardening himself against severe criticism, he writhed as he saw the opinion expressed that his was a dangerous, if not an unclean, book. He thought he had counted the cost before he had written it, but now he felt he had paid dearly for his popularity. Besides, was his story true to life? He had tried to persuade himself that he was conferring a favour on humanity by exposing fallacies, and ridding the world of rubbish. He had attacked Christianity, attacked accepted morals, attacked the marriage code, and laughed at things which old-fashioned people accepted as sacred. Now as he read it over old dreams, old ideals, and old hopes came back to his mind. Years ago they were real to him. Was he

happier since he had discarded them? Would humanity be happier if old-world morality went by the board? After all, was not Christianity a beautiful dream? Aye, might it not in essence be true? Still, he had written his book, it had brought him a notoriety shared by very few, and it had made him the most popular author of the year.

He turned to a literary paper, and read the publishers' announcements.

MERLIN ROSEVEAR'S NEW BOOK! THE SUCCESS OF THE TIMES!

Following this was a striking statement of the reviews as follows:—

"The book of the day."—*The Moon.*
"The book of the week."—*Venus.*
"The book of the month."—*The Iconoclast.*
"The book of the year."—*The New Planet.*
"The book of the century."—*The Boomerang.*

For a moment he forgot sad thoughts, forgot all feelings of regret. What higher testimony could he have than this? Why should he care about the criticisms of people who had not cast off the swaddling clothes of childish orthodoxy? His was a book for men and women of the world, a book for those who could eat strong meat.

It was true the reviews in question were written by men who——but what was the use of thinking about that? How many reviews were spontaneous and uninfluenced by those in authority? He was in the swim and he would sail with the tide. Perhaps if public feeling veered back towards old-fashioned beliefs again, he—but there was time enough for that yet.

He had no need to trouble about money; his marriage had made him wealthy, independent of his books. His wife's father's influence, too, was as great as ever, and there

was but little danger of his losing literary prestige. He was, moreover, a young man, entering on the very prime of his physical manhood; the world was at his feet, and he had placed himself on his high pedestal by his own brains, his own foresight. And yet he was not happy.

His home life was not all he desired. For the first month or two after his marriage, his wife seemed young and in buoyant spirits, but of late she had grown weary and at times peevish. Yet why should she? She was the wife of the most popular novelist of the day, the man about whom the tongues of the world were wagging.

"I'll have it out with Kitty," he mused one day; "I don't like the way she behaves at all. Any one might think I was the most complete failure of the time instead of the most brilliant success."

When Merlin's book had been out a few months all talk about it ceased—to all appearance suddenly. One day he was the favourite of the reading world; the next interest in "The Failure of David's Son" had seemingly died out. Such an event not unfrequently happens in the world of letters. Few things in life are more fickle than popular applause. There was no longer a rush at bookstalls to buy his work, neither were his revolutionary ideas the engrossing subject of conversation. His story had had its day, and now suddenly it ceased to interest.

The chief reason for this was that a new star had appeared in the literary firmament. A book entitled "Morning" had been published by a leading firm of publishers, and diverted attention from "The Failure of David's Son." At first the press had taken but little notice of it, but one day an influential paper had devoted a special article to it, and the next the remainder of the first edition was taken up, and orders came in rapidly for a further supply.

As the weeks passed by interest in the author of "Morn-

ing" began to be aroused. Who had written it? No one seemed to know. The name on the title-page was evidently a *nom de plume*. Who was "Arcadia?" Was it man or woman? The answer was not forthcoming. Some of the reviewers felt sure that "Morning" was the work of a man; others again were equally certain that none but a woman could have given such an exquisite picture of life.

Just as when "Currer Bell" wrote *Jane Eyre* and set the world wondering who the new genius was, so the author of "Morning" was enshrouded in mystery. Some of the papers attributed the story to a well-known novelist, and said that this author had long desired to know how his work would be received without his name being attached to it. Others again laughed at the idea. The writer in question did heavy, ponderous work. His canvas was large, and the figures upon it were many. "Arcadia," on the other hand, did not crowd the stage with many actors. Moreover, the touch was light, the writing was clear and crisp, the situations were new.

No one, however, not even the publishers, knew who "Arcadia" was. The letter accompanying the novel gave no clue. It simply desired that the reply should be sent to "Arcadia," in care of a London lawyer.

The book, however, was taken up eagerly, perhaps because it was true to its name. All through the story the early sunlight seemed to rest, everywhere the dew was upon the flowers, the birds were singing, and the shouts of children were heard. One night when Merlin returned from his club he found his wife sitting up for him.

"Not gone to bed yet, Kitty?" he said.

"No, Merlin."

"Anything the matter? You look pale."

"I might say the same of you, Merlin. You will need another rest soon."

"Yes, I have been working confoundedly hard. I have been trying for weeks to fasten on a new idea, but nothing grips me."

"Write something like 'Lovelight.'"

"I can't. I'm gone past that kind of thing. It will do very well for foolish lads and girls. One must describe life as it is."

"As it is, yes. Only some people see it differently from others."

"Still carping on that, Kitty. Give it up. I'm not the man to make you foolish. Your desire for a second childhood is madness. Life is not like I described it in my foolish days."

His wife got up from her chair.

"Merlin," she said, "I feel that I cannot go on living this hollow, heartless kind of life any longer. What is the use of it? What is there to live for? I hate what is called society. I loathe this existence without tenderness, beauty, or love."

"We must take life as we find it, Kitty," said Merlin, wearily.

"Life is what we make it," she replied.

"What has brought this craze on you again?"

"I hoped," she went on, "that when I married you I should be able to get out of this miserable, artificial life. I hoped to be able to find some sort of faith. I am sick—sick to death of the miserable twaddle about breaking away from old-fashioned morality. I loathe the atmosphere that we breathe. There must be something in life true and pure."

"Don't be a fool, Kitty. Surely the woman that wrote 'Hymen' is above this kind of thing. What book have you been reading?"

He went to the table at which she had been sitting and took up the book which lay on it.

"'Morning,' by 'Arcadia,'" he read. "Surely you have not caught the craze; surely you are not going to join in the chorus of praise about this twaddle."

"Have you read it, Merlin?"

"I should hope not. I have something better to do with my time."

"I would give everything I possess to be able to write like it."

"Nonsense."

"I would. It is something like your 'Lovelight,' only—better. I seemed to breathe a new atmosphere as I read it. It made me have great longings, it made faith possible, heaven possible. Life such as is described there is something to be desired."

"It is some goody-goody Sunday-school book, I suppose."

"It is a book for any one. It does not arouse interest by describing unlawful love; it appeals to all that is pure and holy. There is not a word of preaching in the book; it simply tells a beautiful story; it arouses tenderness, sympathy. It makes life young; it makes romance possible. It tells of such a life as I dreamed of, and hoped for when you and I were wed."

"Are you tired of me so soon, Kitty?"

She looked at him as though she wanted to say something that had long been in her heart. Her lips trembled but she did not speak.

"I think I will go to bed, Merlin," she said; "I'm tired."

"All right; I won't come yet. I'm not sleepy. Besides, I see some letters here."

He watched her as she left the room; then he said, slowly, "Well, life's a poor show after all; it's different from what I thought it would be. Why is it, I wonder? I've got on, that book has been a tremendous success. It is true it has slumped right down, but then I couldn't expect it to go on

selling for ever. Anyhow, I seem to be pushed aside by this new writer. What is there in the book to set them all talking."

He picked up some packages from the table, and looked at them one by one until he came to a letter which bore the St. Endor postmark.

"It's from mother," he said. "I wonder what news there is from Cornwall? I wonder how Helen Granville is getting on? Has she forgotten me? Mother has not mentioned her lately."

He broke the seal of the letter.

CHAPTER XXII

"MORNING"

THE letter, as he had anticipated, was written by his mother. The poor soul was evidently in great trouble. "I don't understand your new book at all, Merlin," she wrote. "What was your reason for not sending it to me? Didn't you think I should like it? When I was down to Truro the other day I bought it. It was a lot of money to pay, but I paid it. Merlin, my dear boy, if I didn't know you to be a Christian young man, who once had thoughts about the itinerancy, I should have thought that an infidel did write it. As it is, I doan't know how to make it out. Why did you laugh at religion, Merlin? It is life to your poor old mother. Why did you speak so slightin' about love an' marriage? Your father and I loved each other nearly forty years agone, and we do still just as much as ever. And as for the unfaithfulness you talk about, why, my dear boy, what do you mean? But there, I don't understand it. I hear how the papers do say it is a great book, so I suppose you must have had a sort of under-meaning which I don't understand. When are you goin' to bring your wife home, Merlin? We shall be fine and proud to see her, although we did have other hopes. We ain't a seed Miss Granville lately, but folks be sayin' as how she's goin' to make it up with Mr. George Newlyn after all. Somehow I don't think she will, unless her father do

make her. People be sayin' that Mr. Granville have been spekilatin' again, and that nearly all his money is gone."

"Poor old mother," sighed Merlin, when he had concluded the letter, "I wonder if she isn't right after all? This is not a letter," he mused, as he cut the string of a small parcel. "What is it, I wonder?"

A piece of cardboard dropped from his hands, and on examining it he found an engraving of Sir Noel Paton's picture, "The Man with the Muck Rake." Underneath was written, "Merlin Rosevear: a faithful portrait."

"Who dares do that?" he cried, throwing the picture from him, angrily. Then he burst out laughing. "Raking sticks, straw, and rubbish, and missing—and missing the crown of life, am I?" he said. "That is the sender's opinion of me."

He lay back in his chair a minute, and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Well, it's not half bad, after all. Who sent it, I wonder? This is a woman's writing. Ah, well, it would have some point if the assumption of the picture were true. A crown of life, eh? Well, the sticks are real enough—anyhow the *chips* are—but the crown—bah! But there, both Bunyan and Paton were dreaming old fools."

He tried to treat the picture as a joke, but still the evident meaning of the sender reached him, the arrow rankled in his heart.

"I must say nothing about this," he mused; "if I do, one of those blessed penny-a-liner fellows will make a paragraph of it, and then throughout all time I shall be known as 'The Man with the Muck Rake.' I suppose it was some poor scrub who can't make his way that sent it—out of pure spite, no doubt."

He took a paper from the table and began to read. It was a leading literary journal, one noted for its scrupulous

honesty and fairness. Presently Merlin lifted his eyebrows. "Hello!" he cried, "here's a lengthy review of 'Morning,' by 'Arcadia.' What does the *Imperial Observer* say?"

He read eagerly for a time, and presently a frown gathered on his brow.

"The insolent wretch!" he cried. "If I knew who it was I would wring his dirty little neck, I would, even although I had to be transported for it."

He turned to the paragraph and read it again:—

"It is a refreshing sign of the times" (concluded the article) "that books such as 'Morning' are being written; it is more refreshing to remember that they are being read and appreciated. This book is a splendid antidote for Mr. Merlin Rosevear's ditchwater, and we venture to predict that long after that gratuitously filthy and vulgar book, 'The Failure of David's Son,' is forgotten, 'Morning' will be read and enjoyed. The books are at the poles from each other; the former is gloomy, pessimistic, foul; the latter is like the rising of the sun on a clear summer morning; it is optimistic, and as pure as the dew. Mr. Merlin Rosevear pulls down, he revels in the evils of human nature, he seeks to destroy faith in religion, and offers nothing in its place. The author of 'Morning' builds up, he or she delights in portraying what is beautiful and tender in life, and whereas Mr. Rosevear tries to show the evil and selfishness in good actions, 'Arcadia' shows the soul of goodness in things evil. 'Morning,' moreover, while free from all preaching, helps one to believe in those lines of Tennyson, where he says that—

"'Nothing walks with aimless feet.'

"We have mentioned these two books together, not because they have anything in common, but simply because they are two of the most popular books of the year. The

interest in 'The Failure of David's Son,' however, is nearly gone, while that in 'Morning' increases; and it is no wonder; it is as it should be. The sooner Mr. Rosevear's work is forgotten the better; to breathe its atmosphere is to breathe disease; to read 'Morning' is like inhaling the pure air of the country.

"Who 'Arcadia' may be we have not the slightest idea. We think the writer is a woman, but we are not sure; anyhow, we gladly welcome this author as a true artist and a powerful novelist; moreover, we shall eagerly look forward for all future work from the same pen."

"It seems to me I'm getting it hot to-night," thought Merlin, bitterly; "anyhow, it has knocked all sleep out of me. Where is this precious book? Kitty left it here, didn't she? No, she must have taken it to her room; I'll go and fetch it."

He went to his wife's bedroom door, and entered silently. He noticed that she was asleep, and then, yielding to momentary impulse, looked long and steadily at his wife's face. It was drawn with pain, and the tears trickled down her cheek. Evidently she was dreaming, and as he watched her lips began to move and she murmured feebly.

"I am so tired," she moaned, "so weary of it all. Oh, Merlin, why is it so hollow, so meaningless? I know I've not been a good woman, but it was not my fault, and I do long for a better life. Why don't you help me, Merlin? Stop writing those awful books, and tell me about the faith you say your mother holds dear. I really can't live without something true."

Presently she ceased moaning, and then taking the book he sought, and which lay on his wife's pillow, he went downstairs again.

"The devil seems to be in it all, I think," he muttered;

everything conspires to make me wretched. I wouldn't have married her if I thought she was going to turn out in this way. Fancy the woman who wrote 'Adam and Eve' and 'Hymen' becoming lachrymose like this. Hang it all, I've been a fool! Still my nest is feathered, and Winthrop is Winthrop, I must not forget that."

He lit a reading lamp and a cigar, and then commenced to read. "I'll see what there is in 'Arcadia,'" he mused, "and if it's worth while I'll send a crushing article to the *Boomerang;* it may turn the tables a little."

When he had read a few pages he stopped. "What does it remind me of?" he asked aloud. "Why, it seems like the rising of the sun behind the hill-tops at home." He read a few more pages, and old memories, old faiths, old hopes came crowding back to him. He forgot that he was the popular author, who had analysed the shady side of London; he was a boy again, a boy with dreams and visions. Presently tears started to his eyes, but he dashed them away hastily. "I'm not a sentimental child," he said, half angrily.

But Merlin Rosevear did not go to bed that night. He stayed hour after hour reading "Morning," and did not close it until he had turned the last page. This done he sat like one bewildered until the servants came into the room.

He hurried out like some one guilty of a wrong deed; he was angry that the servants should have found him in this way, and yet he could not have told why.

"She *can* write, there's no doubt about that," he said to himself. "Yes, it is a woman; no man's hand penned that book, but who can she be? Can it be—but no; it is impossible, impossible!"

He went up the broad stairway like one in a dream, and was about to enter the bedroom again when he stopped.

"My head is dizzy," he said, "and my eyes burn. I'll get a bath."

He went to the bathroom and bathed his head. "I was a boy again as I read it," he mused, "a boy; I could see the corn waving, I could see the dew-drops shining, I could hear the birds singing and the sea surging in the distance. I'll find out who it is, I will. I'll go this very morning and see Fred Gray; he'll know who wrote it right enough. It's all wind to say the publishers don't know who this 'Arcadia' is. What about agreements? what about cheques? Yes, Gray will know, and he will do anything to oblige me."

He breakfasted with his wife as usual, and was more affectionate towards her than he had been for days past.

"Merlin," she said, evidently appreciating his more than ordinary kindness, "let us go into the country somewhere. Let us see life sweet and young. Let's go down to your old home."

"I'm afraid you wouldn't be happy there, Kitty; my father and mother are cottagers; the house is scarcely bigger than a good dog kennel." As he spoke he remembered the day that Helen Granville came to see him; he remembered the love he had felt for her, the love he had since sacrificed.

"I should like to stay in the cottage, Merlin. I should like to see your home and your father and mother; I should like to hear them talk about your boyhood."

"Very well, we'll see about it," he said, hastily, thinking of Helen Granville again, and wondering whether, if he went down, he might have an opportunity of seeing her. What kind of a meeting would it be? What would she say?

"It will be beautiful to find some one possessing a simple faith, and living such a life as your mother lives," she said. "Arrange for us to go quickly if you can, Merlin."

As soon as he was able Merlin found his way to the office of Mr. Frederick Gray, the managing director of the firm of publishers which had issued "Morning." Since he had risen to popularity he had received overtures from the same

firm, but had decided that on the whole Messrs. Quill and Steel would do the best for him. He had kept friendly with Mr. Gray, however. "It is always well to keep on the right side of a good publishing house," he frequently remarked to his literary friends; "for my part, I think that the author who follows in the wake of Byron, and talks about Barrabbas being a publisher, is a fool."

When he arrived at Mr. Gray's office he was immediately admitted. He remembered the time when, with trembling steps, he came to the door of this great publishing house, and when he asked to see the publication manager was told that Mr. Gray never saw any one except by appointment. He remembered, too, the look of pitying contempt on the clerk's face as he produced a manuscript, and said he should like a little conversation with the manager about it before it was submitted to a reader.

"All manuscripts are dealt with on their merits," the clerk said, pompously. "I daresay you'll receive an answer in three weeks or so."

"Then I can't see Mr. Gray?"

"Impossible!" and he had gone away crestfallen, weary and hungry, yet with a great determination to conquer his difficulties even yet.

Now all was different. No sooner did he present his card than the clerk was the soul of politeness. Certainly, he would tell Mr. Gray at once, and he hurried to that gentleman's room without delay, and a few seconds later returned saying that Mr. Gray would see Mr. Rosevear immediately.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Rosevear," said Mr. Gray, holding out his hand as Merlin entered; "it is a long time since you called here."

"I have called in the past though," replied Merlin with a laugh, "and have been as good as kicked out."

"The clerks knew not a famous man in those days."

"Evidently not. I was thinking as I came up just now of the time when I asked to see you, and was told that you never saw any one except by appointment, and that Mr. Gray was *very* busy."

"Good; well, you've had your revenge since. Have you got anything good to offer us? You made a tremendous hit with that 'Sorrows of David,' but I think we shall run you close."

"'Sorrows of David?'"

"Yes; that was the title of your book, wasn't it?"

"No; it is 'The Failure of David's Son.'"

"Oh, so it was. I was sure it was something about David; I haven't read it myself, but of course I know it has been a tremendous success. I'll be glad to make terms with you for your next if you are dissatisfied with Quill and Steel. You both made a hit, although the book was, I suppose, very risky as to morals. Still the world wants a sensation, and Quill rejoiced that he was the medium through which it was made. Not that we have anything to complain of. This book of ours is going like wildfire."

"What book?"

"Why, 'Morning.' Of course you have heard about it."

"Yes, my wife was reading it yesterday."

"It's going to be a grand thing for us. It might have been better, but the writer did her business through a lawyer, who is a keen fellow. I wish we had bought the copyright completely. She'd have taken £50 for it but for the lawyer fellow, I'm sure. He, however, stuck out for a royalty. Still we have done and are doing very well by her."

"Her! It is a woman then?"

"Oh, yes. I may say that."

"You haven't advertised much?"

"No, that's the best of it; there has been no need. The

sale of the book has been steadily increasing each day. We have a difficulty in supplying the demand."

"You are to be congratulated."

"We are indeed."

"Of course you've seen the author?"

"No."

"But you know who she is?"

"Ye—es, we know her name."

"And her place of residence?"

"Yes, we *know* it."

"Well, who is she?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell."

"Nonsense."

"Fact, I assure you."

"But what can be the use of concealment? Is she anything out of the common? Is she any great lady?"

"Nothing of the sort. A lady certainly, but as obscure as Currer Bell of long ago."

"But from what part of the country does she hail?"

"I am not at liberty to tell even that."

"Why, your clerks must know. You will be constantly getting letters for her?"

"Yes, they are beginning to stream in now."

"And you forward them to her?"

"Certainly."

"But your clerks will talk."

"They know nothing about it."

"Oh, I see—a mystery, eh?"

"No, only she does not wish to disclose her name yet. At first even we were ignorant of it, but that state of things soon came to an end."

"Well, I'm curious. I've just read the book myself, and I can't help thinking that I've met the author."

"All things are possible; the world is small."

"She hails from a western county, eh?"

"Perhaps, perhaps from a northern one."

"Oh, I see, you won't split."

"A promise is a promise."

Merlin left not long after, feeling that he had been beaten. Why he did not know, but he desired more than he could say to know the name of the author of the novel called "Morning."

Feeling unfitted for work he walked along the Strand, towards the restaurant where he had seen Vivian Gregory on the day when years before he, Merlin, was starving.

"I'll go and have a bite there," he said; "I feel as though I were just come from Cornwall again and had no money in my pocket."

He had barely entered the room when he heard a familiar voice close to him.

"Rosevear."

"Is that you, Gregory?"

"Yes, will you have some lunch with me?"

"With pleasure. Got anything new?"

"I think so. Anyhow, you may be interested to know, I'm off to Cornwall for a holiday."

"What part of Cornwall?"

"To your old home. To St. Endor."

Merlin drew nearer to Gregory as though some suspicion were aroused.

"When do you go?"

"To-night. I leave Paddington by the six o'clock train."

CHAPTER XXIII

VIVIAN GREGORY'S VISIT TO CORNWALL

"YOU haven't been there since—since I first saw you, have you?" asked Merlin, after a few minutes' silence.

"No. I have promised myself that I would go down for a long time, a couple of years in fact, but the right time didn't seem to come. I can manage it now though. I can afford a month of downright laziness, and I'm going to have it."

"You spend money freely too. Things must be going well with you?"

"Yes, fairly. Of course, such little successes as mine fall flat after your great boom, but my last book has had double the sale of any other, and I've just received my publisher's Midsummer cheque. Of course, I'm a poor man compared with you, but I have enough to pay for a jolly good holiday, and I'm going to have it."

"That's right. I—I suppose you've never heard anything from—that is—about Miss Granville?"

"No. You see, I never spoke to her; she does not know me in any way. You should know better than I. I never hear from Cornwall. You do—you should know."

"No, I know nothing. You see——" Merlin hesitated.

"Yes, I see. I may see her however."

"If you do—I—I wish you would tell me. That is how she looks—and—and so on."

"But you can have no interest in her now?"

"No—that is—well, one can't forget—everything."

"I see. Well, I may not see her, and even if I did there would be no chance of speaking to her—I'm afraid," he added, after a pause.

"Perhaps not. But you'll call and see my father and mother. Tell them I'm very—very successful."

"And happy?" added Gregory.

"Happy! Oh, yes, as happy as the—the rest of the world. By Jove! I wish I were going with you."

"Well, why not come?"

"No; I must not. You'll have a jolly time, Gregory."

"I mean to," and there was a look of anticipation in his eyes.

"London is insufferably hot, insufferably dull, just now."

"Yes, it's hot. Hurrah for the Cornish lanes and the clear blue sea. Good-day, Rosevear; I've got a few things to arrange, and I'm eager to be off," and Gregory took his hat from the peg close by.

"Good-day," repeated Merlin, wearily; then he added, "I suppose you've read this new book by 'Arcadia'?"

"Oh, yes; it's very beautiful. It makes me long for the country air and the sea; I believe it decided me to go to Cornwall. You can almost hear the birds sing as you read it."

Gregory left the restaurant, while Merlin sat watching him. "Yes, that's it," he mused; "it makes you think of birds and flowers and things beautiful; my book made people think of hell. But there, what's the use? I should like to know who wrote it though; it couldn't be——" He stopped as if in doubt; then he added, quickly, "No, it is some clever girl who knows nothing of life."

He walked down between the rows of tables, and had

nearly reached the door when another familiar voice reached his ear. He turned and saw the editor of an important weekly illustrated paper.

"I say, Rosevear, you must look to your laurels; this 'Morning' is throwing its shadows over your 'Failures.'"

"Is it?" responded Merlin. "Well, as 'Morning' passes on into 'Day' the shadows depart."

"Good. But after all these books, which give a bit of idealism and are optimistic, make one fear for books like yours which deal in risky morals. Have you seen the *Imperial Observer?*"

"Yes."

"They give it you hot, my boy. Still you can afford to laugh at them all. You wouldn't take a couple of thou' for royalties up to date, I expect."

"No, thank you."

"Well, you are a lucky beggar. But I hear that 'Morning' has reached 30,000. Tremendous, isn't it? I'm going to write the author for a serial."

Merlin walked along Fleet Street in a bad humour.

"It's all 'Morning' and 'Arcadia,'" he said, bitterly. "I must put a stop to it somehow, only I can't work. I can't think of anything which grips me. Why is it I wonder? Years ago I had dozens of ideas—now nothing interests me."

Meanwhile Vivian Gregory went to his lodgings and prepared for his holidays.

"It's grand to think of," he laughed; "just grand. A month of country, a month of sea air, a month of rest. I wonder now, I wonder——" and then a strange look came into his eyes.

Early the following morning he crossed Saltash Bridge and looking out of the carriage windows saw the shining waters and the wooded hills beyond.

"It'll be a bit quiet at St. Endor, I expect," he mused, "but so much the better if—— But there, Brooks will be at Newquay, and if I am lonely I can go and see him."

He drove to the house at which he had stayed when he visited Cornwall long years before, and the woman who had waited on him then received him with characteristic warmth.

"I be purtin glad to see 'ee, Maaster Gregory," she said. "Of course, strangers be'ant quite so sca'ce as they used to be, for St. Endor is beginnin' to git known, but we be so far from the railway that people do'ant come much."

Gregory entered the little parlour which Mrs. Williams had prepared for him, and looked out over the meadows which surrounded the house. Beyond these was moorland, or what the villagers called "The Downs." It was covered with heather and furze, which, being in their summer bloom, made the whole hillside ablaze with purple and golden glory. It was still early in the day, and the sweet air was wafted to him through the open window. He took a deep breath and filled his lungs.

"It's like new life," he said, and he laughed like a boy.

Mrs. Williams bustled into the room and made ready for the midday meal, and then, when she had gone, he saw a farmer's cart go lumbering along the lane. The boy who drove the horse sat on the tail-board of the cart, which had been placed for a seat, and was evidently enjoying the summer weather, although, perhaps, he would not have been able to tell why life was so pleasant to him. He sang lustily, however, and Gregory heard the refrain of his song :—

> "For to plough, and to sow,
> And to reap, and to mow,
> And to be a farmer's boy."

"The young beggar is happy anyhow," laughed Gregory. And then he listened to the glad chirping of the birds,

which flew from bough to bough among the trees near the house.

After his meal he went up to the Downs and lay down on a carpet of heather. Away in the distance he heard the thud of Besowsa "Stamps," while the laughter of boys and girls on the "stamp floors" reached his ears when once or twice the "stamps" ceased. Above him the light, fleecy clouds drifted across the sky; near him was the blaze of heather and furze bloom; farther away the corn waved in the summer wind and ripened under the summer sun. Still farther in the distance the sea-waves playfully leaped on the rocks which studded the coast.

"I don't think I shall be lonely," said Gregory, contentedly. "I feel as though I could lie here for ever. This is better than Newquay, and so, if I feel like it, I'll ask Brooks to come here and share my lodgings."

Still there was a wistful look in his eyes, as though something else was needed to make his happiness complete.

His eyes were constantly turned seaward, too, and rested often on what seemed a large group of trees, which stood between him and the coast.

"I'd give everything, everything if it fell to my lot," he said at length "but there——"

He lit a cigar, and watched the circles of smoke as they ascended.

"I still hold fast to my ideals," he said to himself after awhile, "and I have the same feelings about them as I had when a boy. I thought when—but there! I'm not the kind of fellow they like. I'm neither showy nor clever. Besides, he saved her life; he—he—but oh, God! what a fool! What a blind fool!"

A sound disturbed him, the sound of a horse's hoofs trampling on the turf. He looked up, and saw a young man nearly his own age riding leisurely along.

"It's Newlyn," thought Gregory; "he doesn't seem a bit altered."

No sooner did George Newlyn see Gregory than he turned his horse's head towards him. Time hung heavily on his hands; he was glad of something to break the monotony of his life.

"Nice day."

"Just beautiful. It makes living a joy," he said, glad that Newlyn had stopped.

"Ah, to you it may be. Of course, you don't live here."

"No, I came down from London last night."

"Oh, did you? You have discovered that ours is a beautiful part of the country, better than the fashionable watering-places."

"Yes," replied Gregory. It seemed strange to him that Newlyn should stop and talk with him, an entire stranger. He did not remember that it was a common thing for people in the country to stop and talk freely with strangers. "I have been here before," he added, after a pause.

"Oh! Long since?"

"Yes, it is several years now. I was here at the time of the accident at Besowsa Mine yonder."

"Oh, that time when that Rosevear discovered the old level?"

"Yes."

"Did I see you at that time?"

"Possibly. I stayed at a cottage yonder. My name is Vivian Gregory."

"What! the author and artist?"

"I have written books and painted pictures."

Newlyn looked more interested, and alighted from his horse.

"Have you a match?" he said.

"Certainly," said Gregory, handing him a box

"By Jove! this is unfortunate," said Newlyn; "I've left my cigar case at home."

"Fortunately I have plenty," said Gregory; "pray help yourself."

"Thanks," said Newlyn. "You may have heard my name if you've been here before; it is George Newlyn."

"I've heard the name," replied Gregory.

"Of course you've heard of young Rosevear who left here? He was a scribbler as a boy. I suppose he's made a name in London?"

"Oh, yes."

"What position would he hold now? Would he mix with the best people?"

"Depends what you mean by the best people. Still there are not many doors in London closed to Merlin Rosevear."

"What, the county families who have houses in London?"

"Certainly."

"By Jove! And he was a miner!"

"Yes, but a miner with brains. In London people will forgive a lot when such is the case."

"He's married, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Who's the girl? Is she respectable?"

"She was a Mrs. Telford. Her late husband was a millionaire."

"And she married Rosevear?"

"Yes."

"Things seem turned topsy-turvy nowadays, don't they? Twasn't so before artisans were educated."

"Shakspere was a butcher's son."

"Just so. Are you staying here long?"

"Perhaps a month."

"Well, I shall be glad to see you if you care to call at

my place. Both my father and I have read your books, and we shall be pleased to have you."

There was something patronising in his tone, but Gregory thanked him, and soon after they parted.

"You don't know the Granvilles at Creekavose, do you?" asked Newlyn, as he held out his hand.

"No," replied Gregory, "I haven't that honour."

"Ah, just so," he said, in a tone of satisfaction, "and yet that——" He did not finish the sentence, but, checking himself, jumped on his horse and rode away.

Vivian Gregory looked after him steadily. "He's not forgiven Rosevear yet," he mused, and then walked towards the cottage at which he was staying.

"I wonder if I shall see her?" he thought. "I wonder if that fellow has made any headway? But what is the use of my troubling. I must be a fool to harbour such a mad feeling all these years. I only caught just a glimpse of her face, and yet I have never ceased to think of her, even when she had promised herself to Rosevear. I wonder now if——?" He set his teeth together and began beating the furze bushes with his stick.

As evening came on he made his way towards the sea, and the pathway on which he walked led close to Creekavose.

"I seem to have lost my senses. I'm like a moth fluttering round a candle," said the young man, as he looked towards the house. "Possibly she's not there at all, or if she is I cannot see her and speak to her. I am nobody. And yet God knows that for six years I have worshipped the very thought of her."

It was the first time he had confessed so much to himself, although often he had felt such a longing to come to Cornwall and tell her the desires of his heart that it was with difficulty he had refrained from doing so. Only the utter

hopelessness of his passion had kept him. Now, however, when he might be within the sound of her voice, and the house in which she lived was only a little distance from him, the love which he had tried to stifle years surged in his heart and mastered him.

Standing on a stile he looked long and steadfastly at the house.

"She may be there now," he said; "most likely she is. I am only a few yards from her, and yet the Poles might be between us. If I could only find some excuse to go in, or if she would only come out! But what would be the use? She does not know of my existence perhaps; certainly we have never spoken to each other, and yet I would give worlds, if I possessed them, to win her."

Presently his heart gave a great bound, and the blood surged madly through his veins. He heard her voice in the garden. It was years since he had heard it, but he remembered it plainly.

"You'll not be long, Helen?" he heard Mr. Granville say.

"No, not long. I haven't been out for the day, and I want a walk along the beach. The tide is out, and the sunset will be fine to-night."

"Well, you need a walk. But don't be caught by the tide."

"You need not fear. But won't you go with me, father?"

"No, not this evening. I am expecting Mr. Newlyn every minute."

"Which—George or his father?"

"What is the use of asking that? George is not likely to come again for a while. But there, I suppose I must not refer to that. Hark! that's the squire's carriage coming up the drive."

Vivian Gregory could not see either of them, but he heard every word plainly. He heard Helen's footsteps, too, as she walked through the garden at the back of the house towards the sea. He remembered the path through the little woody dell along which she would go.

Like one in a dream Vivian Gregory walked seaward too. His brain seemed on fire; he tried to think of some means whereby he could without rudeness speak to her.

He saw her walk along the meadow path, the same graceful figure that he had remembered years ago—not quite so slight perhaps, but none the less beautiful. He loved her with all his heart, and yet she was, perhaps, ignorant of his existence. But he determined that he would speak to her that evening.

"Oh, if only something would happen," he said, "something whereby I could render a service like Rosevear did. But there, what is the use? She can never be anything to me. Besides, what reason can I give for speaking to her?"

Still he kept behind her, too far away for her to guess she was being followed, but near enough for him to watch her every movement even in the light of the dying day.

Presently she entered the little wooded dell, where he lost sight of her, and it was then that the *deus ex machina* which he longed for, intervened on his behalf.

CHAPTER XXIV

A CRISIS

THE powers which worked on Vivian Gregory's behalf did nothing very wonderful. They simply sent a couple of gipsies up the footpath, and put it in their minds to be very eager and pressing in their solicitation for help. They would not have done Helen Granville any harm, but they were desirous of frightening her sufficiently to lead her to give them all the money she carried with her.

It was when she had reached the middle of the wood that they stopped her, and asked, in their usual gipsy whine, for help to buy their "pore little childer, who was in the caravan, an' who 'adn't 'ad blessed bite for the day, jist a few odds and ends for supper."

Helen gave the man a sixpence, which the gipsy looked at scornfully.

"And wot's the use o' this?" he asked. "'Ow would you like to keep a starvin' family of sivin, as 'asn't tasted a mouthful for more than twenty-four hours, on a bloomin' tanner. It's not worthy of yer, miss, and I'm sure you won't send us away with sich a paltry gift."

"I shall give you no more," replied Helen.

"But you will, I'm sure, miss," said the woman who accompanied the man. "I can see as 'ow you are a sweet, generous, and beautiful young lady, and 'll marry a lovely rich gent," and with that she passed her, and got on to the

path on the other side, thus cutting off Helen's means of retreating by the way she had come.

"I tell you I shall give you nothing more," replied Helen, "and will you allow me to pass, please."

"I only axes for five bob," said the gipsy, "and Sal 'll lay it out werry carefully and give the childer sich a treat."

"Stand out of my way," said Helen, and she endeavoured to pass the man, who, in his eagerness to get the money, and believing there was no one near, placed his hand on her arm.

"Not so fast, miss. As you may see, I'm wot you may call a gentleman gipsy, and would scorn to take undoo liberties with a lady; but I really must press for that 'ere five bob. I couldn't do with less now, raaly."

"Stand aside, and let me pass, I tell you," cried Helen, her eyes blazing; but the gipsy did not move.

"Only five bob, my pretty young lady, and thet's nothink to you."

Vivian Gregory had heard the sound of voices, and, hurrying on, had come near enough to hear the gipsy's last words and to understand the position in which Helen was placed. It only took him a few seconds to reach her then, and so quickly did he come that he took them by surprise.

"Let go that lady's arm!"

The gipsy withdrew his hand immediately, startled by the tones of a man who was evidently angry.

"How dare you touch her!" continued Vivian. "Begone at once, or it will be worse for you."

They needed no second bidding; with muttered oaths about "not knowin' any one was near," they rushed rapidly up the footpath.

"I hope you are not frightened?" said Vivian.

"Not much. I'm glad you came though. Thank you very much."

"I'm more delighted than I can say," stammered Gregory;

"it seems as though Prov——" He did not finish the sentence, he dared not say what was in his heart.

"I was never molested before," she said. "There are very few tramps of that sort who come into the neighbourhood. Seeing me alone, I suppose they thought they might be bold. I am sure I am very much obliged to you."

"It's nothing, of course," responded Gregory, awkwardly, "nothing, only I am glad I was near. You are sure you are not frightened?"

"Not in the least—now. I feel quite brave again, but I must not detain you. I think I will go back home."

"I must not let her go like this," thought Gregory. "I've got my chance, I must make the most of it"—and yet he knew not what to say.

"It's strange I should have come this way, isn't it?" he continued, awkwardly. "I only came down this morning—I mean from London. I wanted quiet. I think I shall get it, too; don't you?"

"Yes, it's very quiet. Few visitors come."

"Yes, I knew that. I've been here before; some years ago. I saw you then!" He spoke anxiously, as if afraid he would offend. "You are Miss Granville."

"Indeed; I don't remember you."

"Yes, I was here. My name is Vivian Gregory."

"Vivian Gregory! Of course I know your name. Besides, you knew——"

She stopped as if confused, and a flush mounted her face.

"Yes; I was here at the time of that accident, when you were entombed in the mine."

She hesitated, as if afraid to speak. Then she said, hastily, "Then you know a young man who used to live here—Mr. Merlin Rosevear?"

"Yes, very well."

"I suppose he is quite a celebrity now?"

"Quite. He has simply leaped into fame. His last book was for a few months the talk of London, and the country too, for that matter. Of course you know that?"

"I knew it sold largely; at least the papers said so. But I am far away from reading circles down here, and hear very little about books. You have read this last book of Mr. Rosevear's, of course?"

"Yes."

"And you like it?"

"No; I cannot say I do. It's very clever, doubtless, very powerful in parts, I suppose. The first he wrote is far better."

He spoke as if he knew nothing of Merlin's former engagement with Helen, and she, thinking him ignorant of the fact, and naturally interested in Merlin, forgot her intention to return home immediately, and forgot, too, that Vivian Gregory was a stranger to her. Besides had she remembered this last fact, the service he had rendered her would have excused her staying with him a few minutes, even had his name been unknown to her. Moreover, she was excited just then.

"Have you seen him lately?"

"Yes. I saw him yesterday. He is very different from what he was when I first saw him."

"Naturally."

"Yes; but as a *man* he is changed." He checked himself. It was not fair to speak disparagingly. "You will have seen the change from his books," he added.

"He is very successful you say?"

"Yes, in a way. He has married a rich, clever woman. His last book was all the rage a little while ago."

"And isn't it still?"

"No. A new writer has appeared, and Rosevear is for the time forgotten."

"A new writer?"

"Yes, and the book he or she has written has taken London by storm; I mean reading London, of course."

"Who is it?"

"No one knows. The name on the title-page is evidently fictitious—'Arcadia'; of course you have heard of it?"

"I have seen it mentioned. And the book?"

"It is called 'Morning.'"

"Have you read it?"

"Certainly. If you haven't seen it, Miss Granville, you must allow me to lend it to you. It's the most beautiful thing I ever read. Just what was needed after Rosevear's pessimism and——" He hesitated.

"And what?"

"I'd rather not say. But you should read it, Miss Granville; perhaps you have, though."

"Yes, I've seen it."

"And of course you like it. Every one does. It kept me up all one night, and when I'd finished it, I walked from my lodgings to Hyde Park. I wanted to hear the birds sing, I wanted to see the dew upon the flowers. It is a book to make a man hate dirt and cant; it makes one realise the beauty of life."

"And it's very popular you say?"

"Immensely. The more so, perhaps, because no one knows who wrote it."

"That is a secret, then?"

"It seems so. I meet with fellows who usually know everything about authors, but they are entirely ignorant as to the writer of 'Morning.' The other day I was at the house of a friend of mine—she belongs to a Cornish family, by the way, a Mrs. Tredinnick—and we were having a discussion about it, but every one was ignorant."

"It must be very interesting. But I must go home. Thank you again, Mr. Gregory."

"You will let me walk back to the house with you?" he asked, humbly. "I shall walk behind, if you will not allow me to be with you. Those gipsies may be loafing around, and I want to see you safe home."

She laughed pleasantly, and they walked along the dell together. Little was said, but to Gregory the place seemed enchanted. He had cherished the thought of Helen Granville for years, even when she was engaged to Merlin Rosevear. He would have come to Cornwall before but for the fact of the relationship which he believed existed between them. He had been true to his friendship with Merlin, however; he had never, by word or deed, tried to estrange them. Nay, he had done his best to make Merlin worthy of her. And yet for years his heart's love had been given to Helen Granville. To him his love had appeared as madness, and yet he could not destroy it, and so, ever since he knew that she was no longer the promised wife of his friend, he had been trying to nerve himself to come to Cornwall, and, if possible, to see her and speak to her. The hopelessness of his passion had kept him from doing so until now, however, and thus, as he walked by her side as the evening dew was falling, while he felt that she could never care for him, he knew that his love was stronger than ever.

And so Vivian Gregory was strangely happy, strangely sad, as he walked by Helen's side, wondering as he did so when he might be able to see her again, and how he might tell her the secret of his heart. Their walk came to an end altogether too soon, and when he bade her "good-night," he hurried back to the place where he had first spoken to her, and then, with fast-beating heart, went down to the seashore, where he walked for hours, thinking of the past and dreaming about the future.

Meanwhile Helen had entered the house, where her father met her. Mr. Granville had a moody, careworn expression on his face, as though a weight rested on his mind.

"Is Mr. Newlyn still here?" asked Helen.

"No; he's gone."

"Anything the matter, father?"

"Yes; there is a great deal the matter. Everything's the matter."

Helen looked at her father anxiously.

"Take your things off, child, and then come to me in the library; I want to talk with you."

The truth was that what Fortescue Granville had dreaded had come to pass. His passion for speculation in the Cornish mines had spelt ruin. He had mortgaged Creekavose to every penny of its worth, and now he had notice that the mortgage was to be called in.

It was concerning this that Squire Newlyn had come to see him. For years both the squire and his son had been much chagrined because Helen had declined the latter's offer of marriage. The squire had upbraided his son for continuing to care for her; but George had been unable to discard his affection, and so year after year he held to his hope that Helen would reward his faithfulness by becoming his wife. The squire had angrily told him that he could "do better," that she was "poor and proud," that she "preferred a paltry scribbler who had been a miner," with many other comforting allusions; but George was not to be dissuaded. Presently Fortescue Granville became troubled about money affairs, and visited a lawyer in Truro, asking him to arrange for a mortgage on Creekavose. This lawyer acted for Mr. Newlyn, and mentioned to him what Mr. Granville was desirous of doing. George, on hearing of this, persuaded his father to advance the money himself,

and thus it came about that the Creekavose "deeds" were placed in Squire Newlyn's safe, that gentleman having advanced more than the Creekavose estate was worth.

"George," said the squire to his son, a few days prior to his visit to Mr. Granville, "I'm tired of this Creekavose business."

"So am I," said George.

"Do you still love the girl?"

"Yes, father, I do."

"And don't you honestly feel that you could be happy with another woman?"

"There is no other woman I would marry."

The old man looked at his son affectionately. There was nothing so dear to him as the young man's happiness; it was for this reason he had sacrificed his pride in seeking to advance his suit for Helen Granville's hand.

"I don't like it," grumbled the squire.

George was silent.

"Do you think she cares for you?"

"I don't know. I've thought lately that she's beginning to like me. She has been much kinder, and has seemed to like me to visit the house. But the moment I begin to approach the subject that is nearest my heart, she—she—talks of something else."

"I wish you could care for somebody else, George. There's Magor's daughter, now. She'll get an estate worth a couple of thousand a year. You've only to ask her."

"No, I couldn't do it."

"And do you mean to say that you can be happy with no girl but Granville's daughter?"

"I mean to say that."

The next day the squire visited Lawyer Tremain, and had a long talk with him concerning Mr. Granville's financial position; and when he came back from Truro

he sent a letter to Creekavose saying when he intended calling.

"I wanted to have a talk about—a—a—that mortgage, Granville," the squire said, after they had chatted a few minutes about various matters. This was on the evening when Helen had met Vivian Gregory in the dell.

"Yes," said Mr. Granville, with an uneasy laugh; "I hope you want to advance a few hundreds more on it."

"No, by Gad, no! Tremain tells me I've put at least five hundred more on it than it would fetch if it was offered to the market to-morrow."

"I believe the land's rich in mineral," said Mr. Granville. "I was 'dowsing' yesterday, and the stick turned strongly to a lode in one of the meadows."

"Don't you trust to 'dowsing,' Granville; it may be a good method for experienced miners to discover mineral, but you are likely to be deceived. Besides, your financial difficulties have come through speculating on mines."

"Yes, that's true," said Mr. Granville, with a sigh; "still, I believe there's a fortune in the estate even now. Could not you manage a few hundreds more?" He said this partly in jest, but more in earnest, for the speculating fever had got hold of him.

"Upon my word, no. Fact is, I'm short of money myself. That's why I've called. I suppose my tenants are no worse than other people's, but I've several now clamouring for new dwelling-houses on the farms, and new cattle-houses. It'll cost me three thousand pounds if it costs me a penny, and I haven't the money."

"But you'll increase the rent?"

"That may be; but, you see, rents only come in by driblets. It's now nine months to rent day, when all my tenants pay—the time we call 'Court Day,' you know—and

so I thought you might care to transfer the mortgage on Creekavose and let me have the money I've advanced."

"You don't mean that, Newlyn?"

"I do, indeed. Sorry to bother you, but business is business. I've consulted Tremain about it, and he tells me that this is the best way to relieve me of my difficulty."

"Of course, you'll give me fair time to look around?" said Mr. Granville, after an interval of awkward silence.

"Three months was the arrangement, I think. Of course, George knows nothing about this; if he did, there'd be Old Harry to pay. You know why. George, as you know, has been—well, foolish for years. You know what I mean. But I must look after him. He's my idol, is George, and I don't want him to be bothered with new buildings when I'm gone."

"He knows nothing about this, you say?"

"He knows about the mortgage. It was through him I advanced the money, in fact. I shouldn't have troubled else. I—I haven't been encouraged. But George is soft-hearted. Oh, no; he knows nothing about my calling in the mortgage—not a word. It would worry him a great deal. In fact, if—if George could be made happy—you know what I mean, Granville—I expect I should have to make sacrifices so as to arrange in other ways. But there's no hope of that, I take it. Of course, family is family, but business is business, and we are talking business now. I want the money, that's a fact, and so, as I said, I told Tremain to give you notice in the—the usual way. I hope it won't bother you." And the squire cleared his throat, evidently glad that an unpleasant duty was performed.

"I'll attend to it at once," said Mr. Granville, in a husky voice; "I'll attend to it. It will be very awkward for me, but I'll attend to it. I am as sorry as any man that the—the two families can't be united. Of course it is morally

certain that Helen will come in for a good thing when her aunt dies; but she may live for years, and she's a very peculiar lady—very. And I am afraid she's not partial to me, so I dare not approach her. I've thought that lately my daughter has been—well, more reasonable—hem !—but of course I can't speak as to the matter. Anyhow, I'll attend to this business at once," and his lip quivered as he spoke.

The squire had scarcely left the house when Helen came in. The look on her father's face made her anxious, and his words told her that some calamity had befallen him.

"I'm sure you love me, my child," said Mr. Granville, when Helen had taken a seat near him.

She placed her hand in her father's, and looked wistfully into his face.

"Ruin is staring me in the face, Helen—positive ruin—and only you can save me from it."

"I, father?'

"Yes, you."

"But how?"

"I will tell you all about it," he said.

CHAPTER XXV

VIVIAN GREGORY'S WOOING

MR. GRANVILLE told Helen exactly how matters stood, and related word for word as nearly as he could remember the conversation he had just had with Squire Newlyn.

"Three months is the time arranged, you say, father?"

"Yes, three months. But he might as well have said three days. I can get no one, no one to advance a similar amount."

"How much is it?"

He told her.

A look of pain came into her eyes.

"So much, so much," she said, as if in wonder.

"Couldn't you make the sacrifice, Nell?"

"No," she said, "I couldn't."

"You will rather see me ruined?"

"Yes, if you put it so. You will not be ruined; I can't believe that you will be made homeless as you say; but, father, I do not love George Newlyn, I never can love him, and it would be sacrilege to sell myself for a house and a few acres of land. You may say I am undutiful and hard-hearted—perhaps I am—but I could never respect myself again if I were to do as you suggest. Give up that idea, father, and let's think of something else."

"Something else! What? It'll mean that I'm turned

out of the house. It will mean that you and I are homeless."

"Very well, we can get a decent cottage for a few pounds a year."

"And what about food, clothes?"

"We must work. We must give up servants, if need be, give up every luxury."

"Child, don't be a fool. Fancy Fortescue Granville living in a cottage! I suppose you would suggest his going to work underground as a miner. Fancy what an honour to the name for Helen Granville to take in dressmaking!"

"More honour than to sell one's respect, one's self, for a few pounds."

"You talk lightly about a few pounds, Helen. It means life to me. Living in a cottage would kill me in a few months."

Helen looked at him wistfully, and for a moment her determination seemed shaken, but presently she spoke again, decidedly, "No, father, I am not a heroine of romance. I am not willing to sell myself. A feeling of self-respect is more than Creekavose."

"Or my happiness?" said Mr. Granville, bitterly.

"Yes, or your happiness, if it is gained that way. Would you have any happiness in knowing that I had degraded myself by selling myself? Would you have any happiness in feeling that I was bound to a man that I did not love —bound by bonds that I should loathe?"

"Helen, you still love that miner fellow—that Rosevear?"

"Well, what then?"

"What then? Helen, have you no pride, no self-respect? Why, the fellow discarded you, wrote you an insulting letter, and since then has married a rich widow. Surely you have driven him out of your mind?"

"No," said Helen, slowly, "I have not."

"You love him still?"

Her lips trembled, her eyes became moist, and she was silent.

"We'll not talk about that, father, if you please," she said, presently.

"Helen, you make me savage," said Mr. Granville; "here's the catch of the neighbourhood, one of the catches of the county, who has been waiting for you for years. A fine, well-conducted fellow—none of your fast, dissolute characters, but a gentleman, who is universally respected! And yet you throw away your life on a common miner, and even when he discards you, even when he marries another, you confess to loving him. Talk about honour indeed! Then you say, 'We'll not talk about that!'"

Mr. Granville walked up and down the room, seemingly unable to control himself.

"Is there no other way out of your financial trouble, father?" asked Helen, at length.

"You know there is not—unless," he added, after a few seconds, "you could swallow your pride and write to your Aunt Margaret?"

"I would rather do that a thousand times than do what you suggest."

"She lives in London."

"Yes, she lives in London."

"I hate to be beholden to her. She opposed my marrying your mother. She, the eldest sister, did everything in her power to dissuade her from having me. She's a woman with strange notions, too. She calls herself 'Mrs.' I am told, although she has never been married, and keeps her house open for every fool who has a novelty to talk about. You have not heard from her, I suppose?"

"She writes me once a year, as you know, and I write her back, but nothing more."

"Do you think she would help us over this difficulty?"

"I don't know. I suppose she is very wealthy?"

"Yes, she has money enough, and you are to be her heiress; she told your mother that before she died. But she says not one penny of the money shall come to me. We almost quarrelled at your mother's funeral. How long since you heard from her?"

"It's nine months now."

"I suppose she's alive and well now, or we should have heard about it?"

"Oh, yes."

"How do you know? Have you heard about her?"

"Yes, I heard this evening—heard accidentally."

"This evening while you were out?"

"Yes."

"Why, child, you were not gone more than an hour. I was surprised when I saw you return so quickly."

"I had an adventure to-night," she said, with a laugh, and then she told her father of the meeting in the wood.

"I had no idea a gipsy would dare speak to you in such a way," said Mr. Granville, angrily. "I'll have the matter looked into. But this fellow, what did you say his name was?"

"Gregory, Vivian Gregory. He is well known as an artist and a novelist."

"Yes, but he may be a nobody for all that. He may have sprung up like Rosevear."

"Mr. Rosevear once wrote of him as a University man, so I suppose he would be a gentleman from your standpoint."

"University man, eh? Well, that's better. Anyhow, it was very lucky that he came by just then. I suppose I ought to do the civil thing and thank him. But I'll have no upstarts here. Poor I may be, but a Granville

is a Granville for all that. But you say he mentioned that he had spent an evening at your Aunt Margaret's house?"

"He spoke of a Mrs. Tredinnick as a friend of his, and as a lady who was often visited by literary people. That corresponds with what we have understood concerning her."

"Well, write her, and ask her about him; then, if he's a gentleman, I'll invite him here. It'll be pleasant to have a little society."

"A few days later, Vivian Gregory received a letter from Mr. Granville, asking him to pay him a visit at Creekavose. That gentleman had previously seen him and thanked him for his timely assistance, hence the letter seemed a natural outcome of their meeting. To say that Gregory was delighted would be to faintly express his feelings.

Mr. Granville received him very graciously when he came to Creekavose. He had discovered among Helen's books two of Gregory's novels. These he had read in view of his coming, and was delighted to find that the novelist possessed an intimate knowledge of the class of people to which by inclination and association he belonged. He also read with much interest the press notices of Gregory's other books at the end of the volumes. The effect of these was that he was more than ordinarily cordial towards the young man. He manifested great pleasure at his coming, and, at the close of his first visit, expressed the hope that he would often pay them a call. As a consequence, Gregory and Helen became friendly, she seemed to be pleased at his coming, and evidently sought to make herself agreeable to him. They met often. Gregory talked much to her about literary life, and literary coteries, and he always had a willing listener. He described to her the life of London, as he had seen it, he told her of the struggles and ambitions of young men who came there, of their successes and failures. He spoke

no word of love to her, however; often as he tried to bring the conversation into this channel his heart failed him, and he left her dejected and hopeless. As his visit drew towards an end, however, he determined to speak. He knew her father was poor; his poverty had become the talk of the village, and although he knew nothing of Mr. Granville's relationship to Squire Newlyn, it was evident that money was a scarce commodity. But this did not influence his love. Nay, he was almost glad that she had no possessions. Although not rich, he was not dependent on his profession, and money as money he had never cared for.

They were walking together one evening on the beach; it was close to the spot he had first seen her.

"Do you know, Miss Granville," he said, with a nervous laugh, "that I was standing by yon rock when I first saw you?"

"I did not know," she replied, "but I remember seeing an artist there one day."

"Do you believe in love at first sight, Miss Granville?"

"I have never thought about it."

"I loved you the first time I saw you."

She looked at him wonderingly.

"I hardly realised it at the time, but I did afterwards. When I went back to London I schemed and planned how I might be able to come to Cornwall and win you, until——" He hesitated.

"Mr. Gregory," she said, "I had no idea of this."

He did not notice her interruption, and went on abruptly, "Until Merlin Rosevear came to London, or, rather, until I saw him there. He was in great poverty at the time. I had been meeting with some friends of mine at a restaurant in Fleet Street, and I saw him standing in the doorway, haggard and starving. He had been struggling without success.

After lunch I took him to my apartments in Chelsea, and then he told me you were engaged to him."

"He told you that?"

"Yes, he told me. I had, as I said, been planning and dreaming for a year how I might meet you; indeed, I had thought of using him as a means whereby I could know you. Then he told me you were engaged to him, and all my dreams were dispelled, all my castles overthrown.

"I was tempted, sadly tempted," he went on, after a pause, "not to help him, and to use means of leading him to break the engagement with you. However, I was not so mean as that. It was hard not to hope for you, hard to feel that you were promised to him; but I did not let him know my feelings. I—I helped him, in fact. For years after that I tried to drive you out of my mind, save as the promised wife of Rosevear, but I couldn't do that. It was too hard. A fellow is capable of resisting only so much. It was hard not to try and drive Rosevear to the devil. I daresay I could have done it easily at one time. But I didn't do that, either.

"I was a mean sort of fellow for harbouring such thoughts at all, but then I was tempted—hard, for I continued to love you more. How could I help it? Rosevear got on—you know that, and I tried, honestly tried—I know I seem a mean prig to tell you about it, but I honestly tried to keep him worthy of you, that is, as worthy as a man can be.

"But I was overjoyed when he told me that—that he was to—to marry Mrs. Telford, although it seemed impossible that you should ever care for me. I'm not a clever fellow like Rosevear, I can't write a book to set England talking, but I love you, Miss Granville, like my life. It isn't of mushroom growth either. I've been loving you for long years, loving you without hope and without encouragement. You are not annoyed with me, are you?"

"Certainly not annoyed, Mr. Gregory."

"I am glad for that—so glad. I know I'm a blundering fellow. I ought not to have told you so soon; but I am going back to London soon, and I felt I must speak. I'm willing to wait—years if need be; but do you think you can ever learn to care for me?"

"Mr. Gregory, I never dreamed of this."

"No, I suppose not. It isn't likely you should care about me, or ever think about me, but if you only could! Couldn't you give me a little hope?"

"No, Mr. Gregory, I cannot. I respect you *very* much, but I cannot think of you in the way you speak of. When —that is—I may speak plainly to you, may I not?"

"Oh, yes, speak plainly please. I don't want to pain you in any way, and I—I ought not to have spoken so."

"I am honoured by what you have said. But years ago I learned to—to love Merlin Rosevear. You know about it."

"Yes, he saved your life, he was a fine young fellow in those days; handsome and clever."

"Yes, he saved my life, and—and I thought I was necessary to his existence, to his happiness. And so——"

"Yes, I understand."

"I can trust you I know—you are a man to be trusted. I remained true to my choice in the face of—of——"

"You needn't trouble to say more about that, Miss Granville, I know what you would say."

"I was afraid of what was coming, I could see it, although I blinded my eyes to the truth, or I tried to; but I cannot change my nature, can I? I saw that my idol had feet of clay, but I cannot destroy all memory."

"But he is married!"

"Yes, I know, but that doesn't undo the past. A promise is to me a sacred thing. I could not promise to marry any one easily. I could not marry unless I could give my whole life to my husband."

"Then you love Rosevear still? Don't answer me unless you care—but believe me your words would be sacred to me."

"No, no, not in the way you think; but the thought of him, married though he is, prohibits me from caring for any one else. Otherwise——" She paused.

"Otherwise you might think of me—could you, Miss Granville? Give me a little crumb of comfort—don't you think you might forget him in time? Mark you," he went on, earnestly, "I feel like you about marriage. I hate this new-woman tomfoolery about wedded life. I abominate this free love business. I cannot bear the idea of marriage unless the man and the woman love each other supremely, and much as I want you I would not marry you unless you loved me—me only. You understand me, Miss Granville? But you must forget Rosevear in time—and then, would there be any chance for me?"

"I don't promise to forget him. I think I see what he has become—I loathe the teaching of his later books, but then—well, you see, he wrote 'Lovelight' as well as 'The Failure of David's Son,' and I remember the author of 'Lovelight,' and not the successful novelist who wrote the other. I've said to you what I've said to no one else; I feel I ought. You understand, do you not?"

"Yes, I think I understand," replied Gregory, slowly and sadly; "I think I understand. I'm a bit dazed, and I hope I've not troubled you, Miss Granville; I hope not sincerely. I think I'll get back to my lodgings, if you don't mind. I shall go back to London to-morrow."

"To-morrow! So soon?"

"Yes, I'd better get back. I like the country for a change, but London's the place when you—you have to fight a thing out. There's nothing I can do for you before I go, is there? No way in which I can help you?"

"No, thank you. You'll call at Creekavose and say good-bye to my father, won't you?"

"If you wish, certainly. Oh, of course, he'd think me strange otherwise. Certainly, I'll call and explain my sudden departure."

But Vivian Gregory did not stay long at Creekavose; his heart was heavy and cold. He had hoped far more than he knew; thus his disappointment was all the greater to bear. He talked pleasantly with Mr. Granville, however, and that gentleman expressed great sorrow at his departure, and hoped that when Mr. Gregory visited Cornwall again he would be sure to visit Creekavose. "That is, if I am at Creekavose when you come again," he added with a sigh.

"Have you any thought of removing?" asked Vivian.

"Nothing is certain," replied Mr. Granville, a dark look resting on his face. "Things turn out differently from what one hopes, and mining is very bad."

The last sentence was spoken hurriedly and in a troubled tone of voice, and it caused Vivian to think that there must be more in the rumours he had heard than he had at first supposed.

When he got back to his lodgings that night he found that Mrs. Williams had company. Being of a social nature, Gregory had on several occasions smoked a pipe with Joel Williams, his landlady's husband, in the kitchen.

"Wan't 'ee come an 'ave a pipe to-night, then, maaster?" said Joel.

"I'm afraid I shall intrude, Joel."

"No, you wean't. Maaster Teague 'ere 'll be fine an' proud ef you'll set down weth we. Maaster Teague es the squire's head man."

Gregory hesitated a minute, and decided to accept the invitation.

"Well, as it's my last night, I will," he said.

"Your laast night, Maaster Gregory! I thot you'd stay two or three days longer."

"Well, my plans are altered. Anyhow, I'll have to leave the day after, if not to-morrow."

"Sarvent, sur," said Mr. Teague, as he sat down.

"Hope you are well," replied Gregory, pleasantly.

"I need to be," replied that worthy, "an' I need to 'ave a 'ead like a almanack. Mine es a 'sponsible job."

"I suppose so."

"Tes, sure 'nough. But law, I git through et oal."

Evidently Mr. Teague had been drinking something stronger than coffee; his voice was a trifle thick, and he talked freely.

"Yours is a big estate, I suppose?"

"Iss, and it do git bigger. I shall 'ave Crickavawse to look after soon, I reckon. The squire 'ave got the deeds, and ef the morgage edn't paid back in a few weeks, the squire 'll take et ovver for good."

Gregory immediately turned the conversation into other channels. He had no right to discuss the squire's affairs with one of his overlookers who had by some means got hold of information; so he led Mr. Teague to talk on different matters. When he was alone in his room, however, he pondered over what he had heard, and he wondered what he could do to save Helen Granville from pain and trouble.

"If matters stand as people seem to think they do," he mused, "Helen will be homeless. From all accounts Mr. Granville is in great straits. I must see what I can do."

The next day he visited Lawyer Tremain in his office at Truro, and then took the first available train for London, where he arrived late in the evening.

"I can, at least, save her from that pain," he mused, as he sat alone in his room that night.

CHAPTER XXVI

BACK TO THE OLD HOME

MERLIN ROSEVEAR decided to yield to his wife's wishes and visit Cornwall. He had difficulty in making up his mind, for he felt that his treatment of Helen Granville, in spite of his excuses for himself, did not reflect great credit upon him. Besides, his wife seemed to grow jealous, and he could not help believing that her great anxiety to visit Cornwall sprang from the desire to see Helen Granville. He could not understand her hatred for the things he loved; he was puzzled by her evident anger at his willingness to throw overboard the faiths and dreams of his boyhood. He had never professed great love for her, and yet she reproached him for want of it; he had known her as a clever woman, unfettered by old-fashioned ideas as to morality and marriage, and yet she was continuously talking about the joy of an undoubting faith, and the beauty of old modes of life. For his own part he confessed to having discarded all his fond boyish dreams; he sneered at men who still held them. He had, indeed, written a review of "Morning" for one of the periodicals, and had laughed at its teaching. He had said that the writer was in the teething-time of her mental life, and wrote of a world which did not, and never had, existed. The book, he said, might do for a reward for a conceited prig of a boy who had learnt a number of Scripture texts,

and was never late at his Sunday School, but must not be regarded as a serious contribution to literature.

And yet he decided to go to Cornwall because of the dreams and hopes of his boyhood. He wanted to visit the haunts of his romantic days when he saw himself a knight of the pen who fought against injustice and wrong, even as the knights of the sword had fought against them in the far back past. He wanted to see Helen Granville, too. He did not want to speak to her, but simply to see her as she really was. Most likely she was a blowsy country girl who once appeared to his foolish fancy as beautiful. And yet the thought of seeing her made his heart beat faster than it was wont ; the memory of his early visions brought tears into his eyes.

"I know I'm a fool," he said ; "I know that Cornwall is dull, and that all these fancies of mine are so much tomfoolery, but I'll go. If Kitty sees Helen, well, I can't help it."

The day before he started, while he was busy arranging his affairs, a servant told him that a woman desired to see him.

"Who is she? Did she give her name?" asked Merlin.

"No, sir. She said you knew her, and would be glad to see her."

"Well, show her in," he said, a little bit impatiently, and the next minute Mrs. Blindy stood before him.

"I've come on a himportant matter, Mr. Rosevear," said that lady, after she had been able to calm down sufficiently to address him.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" said Merlin.

"No, nothink—well, nothink has heppened petikler ; still, I wanted to see yer."

"Well, Mrs. Blindy, I shall be glad to render you any service. Tell me what you want."

"I 'ope I knows wot's becomin' of a lidy, Mr. Rosevear,"

replied Mrs. Blindy, with decision, "and so I ain't a-goin' to talk of this 'ere matter ov mine afore I've done my dooty. You've bin and got merrid, I find."

"Yes, I've got married."

"I see it in the pipers, Mr. Rosevear, for although I hev come down in the world I've still littery tystes, and I tike a pleasure in readin' about littery people. Wen I sees that you were merrid, I naturally expected for you to send me some kike for old aquyntance sike; but although you i'nt a-sent me none I'm not a-goin' to be awd on ya, and as a lidy I aint a-goin' to throw *thet* up aginst ya. But wen I finds w'ere you lived I mide up my mind I'd come and congratulate ya. Oh, I knows my dooty as a lidy, although I hev been brot down in the world since my 'Arry took to slummin' for the Awmy. I 'ope as 'ow Mrs. Rosevear is well?"

"Yes, very well, thank you."

"Well, Mr. Rosevear, I allays rejiced in your suckcess, and I'm glad you've got sich a nice furnished 'ouse. I took the liberty of jist peepin' in the drorin'-room while the servant kime to announce me, and I my sy thet even in my best dys I was never accustomed to a drorin'-room like *thet*."

"Thank you," said Merlin, half angry, half amused.

"An' I 'ope, too, Mr. Rosevear, thet altho' you didn' send me no weddin' kike, you'll send me some christnin' kike—at the proper time."

"You may depend on me," Mrs. Blindy.

"An' now hevin' done my dooty as a lidy, altho' I hev bin brought down in the world, I should like to come to bisness."

"Yes, Mrs. Blindy."

"You know, Mr. Rosevear, that as a lidy I am naturally ambishus about 'Arry."

"Naturally."

"Well, I ses ter 'im a few weeks agone, ''Arry,' I ses, 'yer sees 'ow Mr. Rosevear 'ev got on,' I ses; 'wy caun't you git on like thet?' ''Ow?' ses 'e. 'Well,' I ses, 'you're well eddicated,' I ses, 'and when 'e kime to me for lodge 'e was nothink,' I ses, 'and look at 'im now,' I ses, 'a reglar gent, and mixin' in the best littery succles. Wy caunt you do thet?' I ses. 'You've got ability, 'an you owe it to me as a lidy, seein' you've brought me down in the world. So,' I ses, ''Arry, you must jist write a life of yerself, and mike a sensition. Besides,' I ses, 'it'll werry likely fetch a lot o' money.'"

"Well, and what did he say, Mrs. Blindy?"

"It was a noo idea to 'im, 'cos, ya see, 'e i'nt a-got no ambishun. It 'nocked 'im rite over."

"Well, what then?"

"The next dy he kime to me and ses, 'Mitey,' sed 'ee, 'it i'nt no use. The General don't 'low no Awmy officers to publish anythink outside the Awmy publishin' depawtment.'

"'Then it's a shime,' I ses, 'wy,' I ses, 'you showed Mr. Rosevear around to git matter for his book'—you wur merrid then, Mr. Rosevear, and I did'n' know it, and I tike it that it was skasely the perlite thing not to tell me, but I i'nt agoin' to throw up *thet* agin ya—well, I ses, 'Caunt you git Mr. Rosevear to publish it for ya; get 'im to hedit for ya, and you rite hunder an assoomed nime, and then when you mikes a sensition, you can jist resign the hawmy, and tike to litterychoor, and I shell tike my proper position as a lidy.'"

"Well, and what does he say?"

"He ses 'ee'll 'ave a try, Mr. Rosevear. Now what do you sy about it?"

"Well, I can say nothing until I see his manuscript, Mrs. Blindy."

"He's hed tremenjous hexperiences as a slummer, and ken rite a reg'lar eye-opener. It'll be the fortin of any publisher, Mr. Rosevear."

"Well, if it is possible I'll get a publisher, Mrs. Blindy; but I can do nothing until he's finished writing it."

"But couldn't you come an' mike a few suggestions to 'im—jist put 'im in the w'y of it like?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't, Mrs. Blindy. I'm going away to-morrow, and am not sure when I shall return to town."

"Oh, very well, then; I'll be goin'. But of course you'll hinterduce me to yer missis afore I goes, Mr. Rosevear?"

For a second a look of annoyance passed across Merlin's face; but catching the humour of the situation, he rang the bell, and told a servant to ask his wife to come to him.

"This is Mrs. Rosevear, Mrs. Blindy," said Merlin, as his wife came into the room. "Mrs. Blindy was my landlady when I first came to London," he said, turning to his wife.

"I tike a grite interest in your 'usband, Mrs. Rosevear; ya see he mide a nime for hisself wen he lodged wi' me. 'Ee was inexperienced in London life then, and I give 'im many a useful hint. I was brot up a lidy myself, Mrs. Rosevear, es you may see, but I was redooced to tikin' lodgers, 'cos my 'Arry give up his situytion to go a slummin' for the Awmy, so I knows a lidy wen I sees 'er, and I knows my dooties as a lidy. I've 'elped the sile of yer 'usband's books a good deal by recommendin' them to my friends."

"It's very kind of you," said Mrs. Rosevear, "but do Salvation Army people read novels?"

"I don't ev no friends along o' the Awmy people, Mrs. Rosevear; I knows my plice better than *thet*. I never mixes with 'em. I mixes with the people I knowed afore I was brought down in the world."

"Just so. Well, it is very thoughtful of you."

"I 'ope w'en my 'Arry have mide a sensition I shall often see you," said Mrs. Blindy. "Then I 'ope to take my true plice agen."

"Merlin, she's delightful," said his wife to him when, after Mrs. Blindy had given them both a hearty invitation to tea, she had taken her departure—"just delightful."

"She wasn't so delightful when I had to live with her, though," said Merlin.

"Well, she's a change, anyhow; and to-morrow we'll have another change when we go to Cornwall. Oh, Merlin, I am anticipating it with so much pleasure!"

"So am I," said Merlin. "That is, in a way. Mrs. Blindy reminds me of the first day I came to London, and of the days before I came."

"Of the time when you left that Cornish girl, Merlin. I wonder if I shall see her."

"I hope not."

"Why?"

"One does not care about remembering the time when one was a fool," he replied, a little bitterly.

A strange look came into her eyes, but she said nothing in reply to his words.

It was a curious sensation that Merlin realised when he got out of the railway carriage, and in the cool of the evening drove towards the village where he had spent his boyhood. It was Saturday, and the stamps at Besowsa mine were silent, and as he looked around him he recognised the objects familiar to him in his boyish days. He did not take his wife to his old home. His father, at Merlin's request, had taken a pleasant house, which in former years had been occupied by the captain of Besowsa mine; he had also instructed his mother to engage a servant-girl. In addition to this, he had written to a furniture dealer in Truro, arranging with him to furnish three rooms, giving

him details as to the kind of articles he required. Somehow he felt ashamed to take his wife to his cottage home, even although she had expressed a preference for it.

"Oa, my dear booy, I *be* glad to see 'ee," said his mother, as she rushed to the conveyance; "and you, too, my dear," turning to her son's wife. "I do 'ope you'll be plaised with the plaace and be at home. Here, John, take the bags, my dear."

"Oh, Merlin, it is delightful," said his wife, "I'm so glad we came. Your mother is such a dear old lady."

"Old-fashioned and very simple," replied Merlin, apologetically, "but she's better than most people."

"I wish I had been reared here," she said, presently. "Life seems so different among these quiet lanes and homely cottages."

"Very humdrum," Merlin said, gloomily. "Goodness knows I was glad to get away. Still, it's all right for a change. I think both my mother and father like you, too."

"I am so glad; I hope they will," and a look of longing came into her eyes.

They were sitting together in the room which had been designated "the pa'lor," and Merlin's mother was busily preparing tea for them, while John Rosevear was stowing away the luggage.

"She do sim to want a pile ov things," mused the simple miner; "ther' must be enough in they there boxes to stock a tidy little shop."

Never, according to Merlin's wife, had tea tasted so delicious, or ham so sweet, or cream so splendid as they tasted that summer evening. Everything was new, and the simplicity of the life was charming.

After tea Merlin went out alone. The sun had gone down, but on that clear summer evening he could plainly see the objects which had surrounded his boyhood.

Yonder was the cottage in which he was born, while away in the near distance was Besowsa mine, where he had worked. Clearly could he see the engine-house above the shaft he had so often descended, while the 'Count House where he had kept the books stood out boldly against the sky.

He wandered on, quietly thinking, until the intervening years seemed but a dream and he was a boy again. He thought of his dreams, his hopes, his ambitions. After all he was happy then. He had lived a life of anticipation, he had revelled in possibilities, and a halo of romance surrounded his life.

Presently he came to Creekavose Lane, and stood on the spot where he had first seen Helen Granville. He thought of her as he saw her then, young and fair and beautiful. He remembered the sensations he had realised when he saw her face, of the great joy that surged through his veins at the thought of winning her for his wife. Ah, the old life was beautiful after all, the dreams of boyhood were pleasant to his memory! He was young, inexperienced, and in many respects ignorant; but he was hopeful, aye, and he was happy!

But those days had gone.

He presently turned to a stile by the hedgeside and got on the footpath which led through the meadows. How plainly each turn in the path came back to his mind, how familiar were the meadows which he had not seen for years!

A cow lay close to the path chewing its cud. He could have sworn that it was the same cow he had driven home to milking for old Dorcas Udy, who had sometimes given him a penny a week for his labour, and when she failed to do this, tried to satisfy him with a huge slice of bread and cream and honey. It was on this path, too, that he had

walked on that eventful night when he had first seen Helen. Without knowing why, he hurried on rapidly, and came to the place where he had seen old Abraham Richards, who had told him about the disused level.

Everything came back to him like a dream. He looked around, and saw the mouth of the level. It was just the same as he had seen it in the old days. The hazel bushes grew thickly around, and the little river gurgled in the distance. He saw the hole by which he had entered the level—larger now than it was then, for the miners had pulled away the biggest rocks in order to bring him out; still, it looked the same. The memory of his struggle to save Helen Granville came back vividly, and the joy he felt when he took her in his arms.

How quiet everything was, how peaceful! He would not have been surprised if old Abraham Richards had come and spoken as he had done years before. Yes; he saved Helen, saved her because he loved her.

"Would I do such a thing now?" he asked himself. "No, I shouldn't; I should regard the whole business as hopeless. I was a fool then, but I had pluck. I'll get away from here, or I shall be getting sentimental."

Following the footpath, which he vividly remembered, he walked seaward. On his right hand was Creekavose. He could but dimly see the house, it was embowered among the trees; but he remembered the giant oaks and the farm buildings. Was Helen there? His heart beat violently at the thought. What was she like? Had the long years changed her? He had thought her face fine and beautiful in the old days; should he think so now? She had inspired noble thoughts then, and it seemed impossible to encourage anything mean or base while in her presence. The old dreams were beautiful after all.

Presently he came to a standstill, and he looked around

him. Yes, it was here he and Helen had plighted their troth; it was here she had told him that George Newlyn was nothing to her, and that he was her all. It was here she determined to brave opposition, aye, even persecution, that she might be faithful to him, Mérlin Rosevear.

The sea surged in the near distance, the white moon sailed in the summer sky, the summer wind played upon his cheek.

"I promised her I would be true, true always," he mused. "I told her that life would be empty, vain without her, I—I—but there, it's all over. Love's young dream was sweet, but it was very silly—very silly; of course it was. What a fool I should have been if I had done what I promised!"

"I've got on better almost than I hoped," he said, presently. "I'm almost famous now. But—but am I happier than I was then? By Jove, the game's not worth the candle; it isn't. Life's a continuous yearning. If you get what you long for you are no better than if you hadn't got it. And yet I wouldn't give up popularity: it doesn't seem to bring me any pleasure, but it has become necessary to me."

He climbed a little eminence and saw Creekavose more plainly.

"What a paltry little place it is after all—a mere farm-house! And yet I loved Helen; I believe I love her now, only in another way. And I don't love Kitty—no, I don't. It's a relief to get away from her. I wonder if I haven't been a fool? Of course, Kitty has brought me money, and old Winthrop's influence was very useful—very, at one time. Besides, Helen would have kept me from writing those problem novels; she would have been a constant irritation to me. And I made my name by them. Did I though? I could have got on without that; and with Helen by my

side, I could have been—— By God, I believe Gregory was right, aye, and that fellow who sent me the picture was right. I'm the Man with the Muck Rake. I've sacrificed the Crown of Life for——"

He burst out laughing, and his laughter was scornful and bitter.

"I'm like a sinner under conviction," he sneered. "I'm about ready for the penitent form. I'd better ask old Siah Tucker to come and pray with me. Of course, I know what all this balderdash about the dreams of youth is worth, and I've actually forgotten that I have a cigar in my pocket. Besides, I must soon be going back, or Kitty will accuse me of neglect. I wish she hadn't got this sentimental craze on her. She's too old for it; besides, if I wanted to be sentimental I shouldn't go to Kitty. I remember 'Adam and Eve,' and 'Hymen'—what would mother say if she read those books I wonder? She wouldn't regard her as a fit wife for her precious son." And he laughed again, a laugh which was half a sneer.

Presently he came into Creekavose Lane again, and he was drawing near the gate which led up to the house when he heard the sound of voices.

"I'll do my best, Mr. Granville, you know I will; but father is unreasonable, as you know."

"Yes, and Helen is unreasonable too. But I have hopes, George; I have strong hopes. Have you spoken to Helen lately?"

"It's George Newlyn and Mr. Granville," said Merlin to himself. "What are they concocting, I wonder?" and he listened intently.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GREATNESS HE HAD LONGED FOR

SEVEN years before Merlin Rosevear would have been insulted had he been told that he would have listened to a private conversation in a clandestine way. But his sensibilities had been dulled during the years. Besides, he was strangely interested in all that concerned the Granvilles; the old life had a stronger hold upon him than he had believed; he wanted to know what George Newlyn and Fortescue Granville were so eagerly discussing.

"How long is it before my father wishes to call in this mortgage on Creekavose?" asked George.

"There are nearly two months yet. Surely a great deal can be done in that time."

"It is possible, of course. You say that that fellow Gregory has proposed to Helen, and has been refused."

"Yes. It is a secret, of course. I discovered it almost by accident, and Helen would be very angry if it were to become known."

"Gregory seems a fine fellow," remarked George. He felt very kind towards him, now that he no longer appeared as a rival.

"A very fine fellow. Comes of a good family, too."

"We had him up at our place one night. My father was much taken up with him. I had no idea that he cared about Miss Granville, though. Excuse me, Mr. Granville, but do you think she still cares for that—that Rosevear?"

"There'll be no danger there. I hear that he's coming here very soon, if he has not already arrived. He's bringing his wife, I suppose, and Helen is not the one to care for any one under such circumstances. She has too much pride."

"But do you really think she's got over her partiality for him?"

"You've no need to fear about that now. If Rosevear were unmarried everything might be different—but Helen is a Granville, thank God, and knows what's right."

"Well, I'll do my best."

"And I'll do mine. Good-night, George. Won't you walk up to the house, though?"

"Yes, I may as well," and the two walked under the avenue of trees towards Creekavose.

Merlin walked away pondering deeply. The conversation had opened his eyes to several things.

"I have discovered three or four facts," he mused. "First, Creekavose is mortgaged to Newlyn; second, George Newlyn is still in love with Helen Granville, and probably this mortgage will be used as a means to force a marriage. Third, Vivian Gregory has proposed to Helen; and fourth, there is a probability that Helen still cares about me."

He roamed along the lane like a man in a dream.

"How long has Gregory cared for her, I wonder?" he said, at length. "Ah, I see now why he was so interested in her, why he was always asking questions. And yet he used no means to estrange us. He might have done that easily. But Gregory always had high notions about honour. She's refused him too, and they believe she still cares about me. I wonder if she does? I wonder now—if—she—really does?"

The thought seemed to have a strange fascination for

him, and he recalled the conversation he had heard again and again, as if trying to find out what lay behind it.

"About their financial trouble," he said, at length. "It might be worth while for me to buy Creekavose. I can manage it just now, and it would be a decent investment. I will look into the matter. If this mortgage is to be called in, I might as well arrange to let old Newlyn have the money. Then I should be Granville's benefactor, and his landlord too, to all intents and purposes. Is it worth while I wonder? What should I gain by it?"

He thought long and deeply; many possibilities flashed through his mind, many contingencies occurred to him.

"Where in the world 'ave 'ee bin, my dear boy?" asked his mother when he returned. "You've bin out for sich a long time. Kitty and I have bin wonderin' what 'ave become ov 'ee."

"I've been down on the beach, mother."

"The baich, my deear boy? Well, I never!"

"Yes, I wanted to see how the cliffs looked. It's more than seven years since I saw them!"

"So 'tes. Well, we've 'ad a nice time together. Kitty 'ev bin tellin' us 'bout the way you've got on in London. Why, you'm a great man, my deear boy!"

Merlin laughed, but there was no joy expressed in the laughter.

"Have you met any of your old sweethearts, Merlin?" asked his wife.

"No, I expect they've all married and have families," he replied.

"No," replied his mother, "Merlin was allays a stiddy boy, and never ded run after the maidens. He never tooked to but one."

"You like this house, father?" said Merlin, changing the conversation.

"Iss, but tes too big for we, Merlin, and mother doan't care 'bout 'avin a sarvent maid in the 'ouse. It ded go awful gin the grain for 'er not to 'ave 'er in 'ere to tay weth us jist now."

Both Merlin and his wife laughed. To the latter especially the thought of having a servant to take tea with her was strange. She did not know that in the farmhouses in Cornwall the custom was common, and that when farmers' wives arranged for the servants to have their food by themselves, they were talked about as "bein' above their staashun, an' wantin' to seem like gentry."

"I s'poase you maake a goodish bit of money?" said John Rosevear, curiously.

"A few pounds," replied Merlin.

"About how much a week now, my booy?"

"I've really never made it up, father."

"I heerd some chaps 'esterday calcalatin' 'ow much it wud be."

"Yes—and how much did they decide on?"

"Well, the new cap'n of Besowsa do git ten pound a month. One man said twelve, but I knaw *that* ed'n true; but the manager do git twenty, some do say."

"Well?"

"Well, some ov 'em said—Siah Triscott, I think it wos—as 'ow you'd be gittin' so much as the manager, and some said you wudden git more'n the cap'n."

"Well, and if I got as much as the manager?"

"Why, you'd be a reg'lar gentleman. Why, twenty pound a month es two hundred and forty pound a year!"

Merlin looked at his wife curiously. Both amusement and anger rested on his face. What must she think of his father talking as though £240 a year were a big income? She laughed heartily, however. The miner's simplicity

touched her; she seemed to be trying to enter into the man's life and understand his content.

"Why, father, we have dancing-girls in London who earn £50 a week!"

"What! Maidens gittin' £50 a week by dancin'?"

"Many, some a great deal more."

"Well, I never! But you, Merlin?" and the father looked at him proudly.

"Oh, I've earned as much as £50 in a day."

"In a day, Merlin? £50 in one day?"

"Oh, yes."

"By writin' they stories?"

"Yes, by writing one short story."

"Well, I never!"

Merlin remembered how when he was a lad he had dreamed of telling his father something like this. He had never hoped even in his wildest flight that he would be able to mention such a large amount of money for a morning's work, but he had fancied the sensation he would make by telling of his successes. Well, the time had come; but it seemed so poor. What was this simple man's astonishment after all? The value of money had changed to him.

"Then you must git mor'n Passon Inch?"

"How much does he get?"

"Eight hunderd a 'ear, I've 'eerd.'

"I wouldn't exchange my income for five times that amount, father."

"Why, my deear boy, you'm a reg'lar Rothschild!"

Merlin laughed. He was proud to tell his father of his success, and yet it seemed so poor. What would make a rustic gape was as nothing in London.

But he stayed a long while talking, and when John Rosevear went to bed that night he said to his wife, "Tell 'ee

wot, mawther, but Merlin knawed more'n we. Wy, s'poase he'd got to be a steward for some big gen'leman, he wudden be gittin' nothin' to wot 'ee's gittin' now. Wy, from wot I can see, 'ee's mixin' weth the people who do kip stewards."

"Iss, it do seem so; but I'd ruther seed Merlin an itenerant, father. A man of God es more than a rich man."

"Iss, but I'm glad 'ee's got on so, my deear. I wonder ef 'ee'll go to chapel to-morra?"

"I 'ope so; but why wos 'ee axin'?"

"'Cause I 'eer ther's a lot comin' to see un."

Merlin went to the little Methodist chapel on the following morning. He would not have gone but for his wife, however; she wanted to see the chapel where he had gone as a lad, wanted to see the simple folk he had so laughed at in his books, and so, although he had not entered a place of worship for many months, he took his seat in the humble little conventicle.

A local preacher conducted the service that morning. An ignorant man who had never learnt the art of doubting, and who would have been shocked at the statements of men who have been called the Higher Critics. He knew nothing about their researches, however, and accepted the story of Jonah and the whale without demur. Merlin had difficulty in keeping from laughing outright at some of the statements made, and yet he could not deny that the man seemed to possess some kernel of truth unknown to himself. There was an unseen power in this simple service, something which commanded his respect, in spite of many things which were incongruous. He had sneered at religion in "The Failure of David's Son," he had caricatured such services as these, and yet he felt that there was a secret he had failed to understand.

As for his wife, she sat like one to whom a new world had

been revealed; she longed to possess the simple faith which these ignorant people evidently possessed.

When they left the building they were closely scrutinised by the congregation. Scores waited in the chapel yard, to "'ave a good look," as they remarked one to another. Many touched their hats at Merlin, and one or two of the girls curtsied.

Less than eight years before he was one of these people. He was laughed at as a foolish dreamer, now he was a man about whom strange tales were told. His wife was said to be enormously wealthy, while he was in receipt of what to them was fabulous wealth. He had longed for this time to come, longed as a lad to prove himself of a different calibre from these people. How things had changed! What was his popularity worth after all? What was it to be stared at by a host of these ignorant folks? He was no happier than they.

"He've made 'eaps ov money," he heard one say.

"Iss, I s'poase 'ee 'ave. 'Ee was allays a clever chap, but too laazy to work weth 'es 'ands."

"'Ee knawed a trick wuth two o' that."

"Iss, an' hes wife es rollin' in money, too, I s'poase."

"Iss, I've 'eerd so."

"But you wudden call 'ee 'mong the tip-top gentry, wud 'ee?"

"Why?"

"Writers 'n like that bean't reckoned 'mong the rail gentry I doan't b'leeve. A rail gentleman doan't do nothin' fur a livin'."

"Yes, they do," said a lad who was a pupil-teacher at the village school. "What about Sir Walter Scott? what about Lord Lytton? They belonged to the tip-top gentry."

Merlin had been walking close behind these people and had heard their remarks. And he had longed for fame

among these people; a part of his dream as a boy had been to create a sensation in the village in which he had been reared! Now he had done it, and what was it worth? Aye, what was all his popularity worth? That Sunday morning, while he felt that to lose it would be pain, it brought him no pleasure. He looked at his wife by his side. She was rich, and clever, and handsome—and yet everything was so different from what he had fancied.

In the afternoon he took his wife along the coast, while she asked him questions about his boyish days. She seemed to delight in his hopes, his struggles, his ideals, his visions; what he was ashamed of she seemed to long after. What did it all mean?

Before a week was over, he was tired of Cornwall. He wanted to get away, and yet he was fascinated. Everything seemed to reproach him, to mock him, and yet he had a strange delight in going from place to place, and thinking of the fancies and hopes of days gone by. He looked for and expected the homage of the villagers, and yet he found no pleasure in it.

He had been disappointed in his plans about possessing Creekavose. He had discovered Squire Newlyn's lawyer and had gone to see him.

Lawyer Tremain seemed surprised when he received a second offer of the amount advanced on the Creekavose property, and began to ask himself whether there was not some value attached to the place unknown to himself. He hinted as much to Merlin.

"My desire to possess it," said Merlin, "springs from early associations. I was born at St. Endor?"

"What did you say your name was?"

"Merlin Rosevear."

"Rosevear—oh, bless my soul, yes—yes, of course. But you are too late, Mr. Rosevear. I made arrangements

about the mortgage some little while ago with another gentleman; that is, providing Mr. Newlyn wishes his money."

"And who is the gentleman?"

"I am not at liberty to say."

"And does Mr. Newlyn know of this offer?"

"N—no."

"Then he imagines that the money will not be forthcoming, and that the estate will fall into his hands?"

"I have no knowledge of what he imagines."

"But you have arranged with your other client that——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Rosevear, I should be sorry to appear discourteous, but I am not at liberty to make any disclosures about the matter."

"After all," said Merlin to himself, as he left the office, "why should I care? It can never be of any use to me. What is Helen Granville to me? That's all gone—for ever," and he laughed bitterly.

"Why is it she never appears?" he thought as he made his way towards the railway station. "I've been hoping, yet dreading to see her ever since I came; but she seems to stay indoors. But why do I want to see her? Kitty would be more jealous than ever if she knew. Ah, but I was a fool after all to get married."

That night, after he got home, he tried to devise a plan whereby he might be able to meet her, or, at any rate, to see her again, and he fretted because his wife always wanted to accompany him everywhere he went.

As the days went by Merlin's desire to see Helen became more intense. He could not explain it to himself, and yet even in the old days he had not the same feverish longing to meet her as now. He walked with his wife a good deal, and sought to appear cheerful; yet all the time his heart and eyes were turned towards Creekavose. St. Endor would

have been intolerable to him but for this. He had no sympathy for his wife's delight in the simple ways of the people; the novelty of being among the scenes of his boyhood wore off after the first two days, and but for the hope of meeting Helen he would have left for other parts.

Once he went so far as to write her a letter, but he did not send it. Supposing she granted him an interview, what had he to say to her? Besides, what right had he to make such a request? So he destroyed the letter, and called himself a fool for becoming sentimental and unreasonable.

He still haunted the footpaths and lanes around Creekavose, however; he still wondered how this maiden, whom he had won long years before, looked and fared.

One day he was walking along the lane close to the spot where he had first seen Helen, when he heard the sound of footsteps. A turn in the lane revealed Mr. Granville coming towards him. Merlin's heart beat rapidly, but he did not alter his course; why should he fear this man?

"Good-day, Mr. Granville," he said, when they came close to each other.

Mr. Granville, who had watched him coming, and who knew him very well in spite of his altered appearance, turned as though he had seen him for the first time. He gave him a haughty stare, and then passed on without a word.

"I'll pay you for that some day," said Merlin to himself, bitterly, and then he laughed aloud. Why should he care for the "cut" of a man like Mr. Granville? Still, he was piqued, wounded.

Neither was his equanimity restored, when, on the same day, he saw George Newlyn. The young squire still felt bitterly towards Merlin. He felt it hard that he, the squire's son, should be discarded for a cottager's son, and he did not hesitate to express the chagrin he felt.

"Well, Rosevear," he said, "you've been away from home several years. You find things changed?"

"Somewhat," replied Merlin, noting that George Newlyn had called him by his surname only. And this, he was sure, was not because he regarded him with friendly equality, but was spoken as a man in a good social position might speak to one in a lower.

"I hear you've got on very well," went on Newlyn. "You get a bigger wage now than when you were at Besowsa, I expect. Where do you work?"

Merlin felt an angry flush rise to his face, but he curbed his temper.

"Where it suits me best," he said; "and you still live the old humdrum life down here, I suppose. I wonder you don't die of stagnation. Still, this kind of thing suits you, I imagine."

George Newlyn was not so dull but that he saw the point of the reply.

"I have my property to look after," he said, proudly.

"Yes, you have," said Merlin, "but it must be confoundedly dull. You have no society either, save that of the Granvilles at Creekavose. I quite pity you. I met Granville's brother in London some time ago. He doesn't feel friendly towards yon branch of his family"—pointing towards Creekavose. "But, still, the poor beggar can't help his poverty altogether, I suppose. By the way, how is our mutual friend, Miss Granville?"

George Newlyn had difficulty in restraining himself from striking Merlin across the face with his riding-whip, and he was angry with himself for stopping to speak to him.

"Miss Granville is not at Creekavose," he said, shortly.

"Indeed! Is she staying away long?"

"I don't know," then, striking his horse savagely, he galloped away.

"I was a fool for speaking to him," he said as the horse tore furiously along. "I wanted to snub him, but he has had the best of it. Hang it, he actually patronised me—he, a miner's son."

The next day Merlin left St. Endor. He wanted to show his wife the Scilly Isles he said, as well as some of the more fashionable resorts of the county.

When he returned to London a few weeks later, he read a paragraph in a literary paper which excited him considerably. It set him thinking rapidly; and it explained much that had been mysterious to him.

"The thought came to me," he mused, "but I discarded it. I did not think it possible. I've been a fool, a big blundering fool! And it's too late for me to take advantage of it. Is it, though? Let me think."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE AUTHOR OF "MORNING"

THE paragraph which Merlin Rosevear saw in the *Imperial Observer* looked very simple and unimportant. It did not contain more than a few lines, and was sandwiched between other items of literary gossip which were of no public interest whatever. This was the paragraph :—

"The name of the author of that remarkably able and successful novel, 'Morning,' has at last come to light. For some time the novel-reading world has wondered much as to the identity of the new star which has arisen in our literary firmament; now we know on good authority that 'Arcadia' is a Miss Helen Granville, who resides at a charming out-of-the-world place in Cornwall, called St. Endor. Miss Granville is a member of an old county family, and a niece of Mrs. Tredinnick, who is well known in literary circles. We are pleased to hear that Miss Granville will shortly visit London, and will be the guest of her relative in Russell Square."

Merlin Rosevear read this item of news again and again, as though he were fascinated. His rival, then, was the girl he had discarded. She who, he had thought, could never be really and truly interested in his work, and would be out of her sphere in the literary world, had outshone him; she had written a book which had caused people to

forget his. She was coming to London as an honoured guest; she would be gladly welcomed everywhere.

"What a near-sighted, blinking idiot I have been!" he cried, again and again.

He thought of his visit to Cornwall, and the gossip so prevalent there. He remembered the conversation he had heard between Mr. Granville and George Newlyn. He knew that Creekavose was mortgaged for more than it was worth, and that Helen's father was trying to arrange for George Newlyn to marry his daughter, so that a financial calamity might be averted.

"It can't be true!" he cried. "If Helen had written 'Morning' she would be in a position to refund the amount. The book must be worth a good deal of money."

He thought of his interview with the publisher of the book, and remembered how he had been told that the author would have a royalty.

"It may be so after all. Probably she does not know what the thing will bring. Most likely the agreement was that royalties should be paid at the end of the year. In that case she doesn't know what she's worth. And yet she must have received applications for work. She must know that publishers would pay her big sums for future productions. Her father must know it, too."

He weighed the matter over again. "Probably she has been keeping the matter a secret from her father as well. Perhaps she had a purpose in all this."

He started to his feet. He remembered the words Mr. Granville had spoken to George Newlyn in reply to a question.

"Perhaps she does care for me still," he cried. "She is not a girl that can cast aside love easily. She refused Gregory, she refused Newlyn; perhaps—perhaps she *does* care for me!"

The thought seemed to act upon him like some potent elixir. His eyes flashed, his cheeks became a rosy red. It flattered his vanity; it aroused old memories, old feelings.

It did not last long, however.

"What's the good?" he cried. "Why should I trouble whether she cares for me or no? She's nothing to me—never can be. I'm married, married—to—to a woman who wants to be young!"

He spoke in bitterness and scorn. He tried to drive the thought of Helen Granville from his mind and heart. But he did not sleep that night.

His wife was not long in hearing what had affected him so strangely, and spoke to him about it.

"Well, what of it?" he said, curtly.

"Your old sweetheart, Merlin—think of it."

"Well, there's nothing in that. Every girl fancies she must scribble nowadays."

"Yes; but think of it. What a feat to write such a book as 'Morning!'"

"It's a thing of an hour—a Sunday-school prize sort of a thing which will be read by a few servant-girls, and forgotten."

"Oh, no, Merlin."

"Oh, very well. Shout with the crowd."

"And to think we should have been so near, and yet never to have seen her."

"Well, we've lost nothing."

"I should like to meet her."

"I daresay you will. I daresay that old Mrs. Tredinnick will trot her around as a kind of 'peep-show.' It will just suit her."

"Why are you so angry, Merlin?"

"Angry!—who wouldn't be angry? The last thing I

heard about before I left London was this balderdash called 'Morning.' Every fool joined in praising it, and wondered who 'Arcadia' could be. Now it's all Helen Granville. Well, let them talk."

This conversation took place at breakfast two days after their return from Cornwall.

"You seem to be tremendously interested in Helen Granville," said his wife, after she had been silent a few minutes.

He rose from the table angrily. A fierce passion was burning in his heart. He went to his study and tried to work, but he could not. His mind refused to think. He wrote a few lines of disconnected twaddle, and then tore it up and threw it into his waste-paper basket.

"What a fool—a blind, blithering fool, I have been!" he cried.

He took his hat and went out. He walked westward towards Hyde Park, feeling angry with himself and with all the world, yet not knowing the reason of his anger.

"Why am I bothering?" he asked himself again and again. What need have I to trouble? My future is assured. If I don't sell another book, if I don't write another line, I am a rich man, and I am Merlin Rosevear, author of 'The Failure of David's Son.' Whatever Helen Granville may do, she cannot undo that fact."

He hailed a passing cab and entered it.

"Ventnor Street, Chelsea—No. 16," he said to the cabby.

"I'm a fool, I know," he said to himself as he lay back in the hansom; "but I'll have a talk with Gregory—I'll get him to tell me all he knows. I'll know why she refused him."

He found Gregory hard at work. The young man's face was pale, and there was a tired look in his eyes.

"Well, Gregory, you look seedy."

"Yes, I am a bit."

"That's bad for you. Why, you've only just returned from your holiday either. What do you mean by it?"

"Difficult to tell. Have a smoke?"

"If you like. Put your tackle away. I'm sick of the sight of copy. Let's have a talk."

"Very well," replied Gregory. "What have you new?"

"Oh, nothing much. Let's see, how long is it since you came back from Cornwall?"

"Several weeks. Why?"

"Oh, I was wondering. I've been down, you know."

"What, to St. Endor?"

"Yes. I took my wife down. She was simply charmed with the place."

"How long did you stay?"

"Oh, between two or three weeks at St. Endor. Then I went on to Penzance, and the Scilly Isles. After doing them, I went to Newquay and on to Tintagel. I've taken my wife to the show-places of my native county, you see."

"I see. Well, how did Cornwall strike you after all these years?"

"Oh, everything's the same. No difference. It's a dead-and-alive county, in spite of all their talk. I sha'n't go again in a hurry. How did it strike you after the same lapse of time?"

"Oh, it was delightful to me. The rest was like heaven. I never saw the sea so blue, or the skies so high."

"Ah, I wonder you did not stay longer, then."

They talked in this way for some time. Both felt that they were fencing with each other, that both refrained from touching the question nearest their hearts. Presently, however, Merlin changed the subject.

"You've seen the *Imperial Observer?*"

"Yes."

"You've seen that paragraph in the literary gossip?"

"What paragraph?"

"About the author of 'Morning.'"

"Oh, yes."

"Weren't you surprised?"

"Weren't you?"

"I hardly know. It does seem a bit strange. You saw Miss Granville while you were in Cornwall, perhaps?" And Merlin Rosevear watched Gregory closely as he asked the question. He noted, too, the flush that arose to his brow.

"Yes, I saw her."

"Often?"

"Several times. You seem to be much interested in her, Rosevear."

"Naturally. You see she's an old sweetheart of mine." He said this rather coarsely, and with a laugh. Gregory felt as though he could have kicked him. "Perhaps you were on intimate terms with her?" he went on.

Gregory kept his temper. "I visited Creekavose, at Mr. Granville's request, several times."

"Then you would naturally talk with her on various matters."

"Yes."

"Did she tell you that she was the author of 'Morning'?"

"No. She said no word about it."

"Do you think it is true?"

"Oh, yes, there's no doubt about it."

"Has the paragraph been corroborated, then?"

"Yes; I've seen Mrs. Tredinnick, I've seen her publisher, too. He talks freely about it now."

"I see."

Merlin Rosevear hesitated a few seconds. He had not

reached the point in the conversation at which he wanted to arrive. He thought he knew Vivian Gregory's nature, and spoke accordingly.

"You admire Miss Granville very much?" he said, at length. "At least, so I should judge," he added, after a pause.

"Why should you imagine so?"

"I was only thinking of the gossip, current at St. Endor."

"What gossip?" asked Gregory, in a tone which showed that he was in no mood to be trifled with.

"Oh, no harm, I can assure you, old man. But people in these country places always talk a great deal."

"Explain yourself, Rosevear."

"Oh, people said that you were sweet on her."

"Who said so?"

"No one in particular. It was the general impression, I suppose; but I took no notice. Of course you were seen with her?"

"Why, then, did you ask whether I had met her?"

"I was wondering if there was a shadow of truth in what the folks said. Perhaps there was, eh?"

"Did you see her?" asked Gregory.

"No. I say, Gregory, you do look seedy and worried. You appear quite depressed, too. Surely such an optimistic brother as you should be more gay. I shall begin to think the gossips told the truth."

Gregory looked at Merlin as though in doubt, then he spoke hurriedly, nervously, as though he were acting against his judgment.

"Yes, they told the truth."

"What! that you are engaged to Hel—that is, to Miss Granville?"

"No; I am not engaged to her. It was not my fault though."

"Why; you asked her?"

"Yes."

"And she refused?"

"Yes."

"I had no idea you ever thought about her in that way," said Merlin, thoughtfully. "Was it a sudden passion, old man?"

"No," said Gregory, his face becoming very stern. "I've loved her for years—loved her when you were engaged to her."

"You kept your secret well, Gregory."

"What right had I to speak? She was not for me, she was promised to you. I dared not go and speak to her for a long time, even after I knew you—you—were no longer engaged to her."

In spite of the fact that Merlin had a feeling of contempt for what he called Gregory's Utopean ideas of honour, he could not help admiring him. He kept his eyes fixed upon him and probed farther. He had not learnt all he wanted to know yet.

"This is strange, Gregory," he said. "I cannot imagine how she could refuse a fellow like you."

"I am not the sort of fellow that women like," said Gregory.

"But you are. I hear that she continues to refuse to have anything to do with George Newlyn, too. Surely she must have some reason for this. Can you guess why, Vivian?"

He spoke almost plaintively, and there was an approach to tenderness in his voice as he called Gregory by his Christian name.

Vivian Gregory was thrown off his guard. He was much excited, and Merlin's conversation caused him to be indiscreet.

"Perhaps you can guess why, Rosevear," he said; "if you can't, I don't know who can."

"I guess! How in Heaven's name can I guess? I have not seen her for years. I—I have lost her by my own cursed foolishness."

There was a tremor in his voice; he seemed as excited as Gregory.

"It is not for me to say any more," said Gregory, angry with himself for having been led to say so much.

Merlin Rosevear tried to continue the conversation on the same lines, but in vain. Gregory felt that he had already said too much, and, anxious to atone for his indiscretion, talked on other topics.

Soon after, Merlin left Ventnor Street, and walked up Sloane Street towards Hyde Park. His face was radiant, his eyes shone with a joyful light.

"She still cares for me," he cried. "The years have not killed her love. I am not mistaken in her. For her to love once is to love always. She is not like the majority of women; she is one of those who hold fast to early loves and early ideals through everything. She still loves me!"

For the time he forgot that he was married, forgot that he had forged a chain which should keep him from encouraging such a thought. At that minute his marriage was a dream, and his wife a mere phantom of the brain. But the truth soon came back to him—came with terrible force.

"You are married," it said. "You discarded Helen Granville years ago; you have forfeited your right to think about her in such a way."

"Oh, what a cursed fool I am!" he said; "and yet, and yet——"

Presently he burst out laughing—a scornful, bitter laugh. He felt ashamed of himself for being so excited; he was

angry because he should be so interested in the woman he had discarded.

He went to his club and had lunch, and on talking with some of his friends whom he met there, found that they, too, were looking forward to meeting Miss Helen Granville when she came to London.

"This girl has created a greater sensation than any one since Charlotte Brontë," said one. "She'll find half the marriageable fellows in London running after her."

"If she isn't as ugly as sin," said another; "a lot of these clever girls are enough to frighten a man. Most likely she has big yellow teeth, yellow skin, and a heavy jaw."

"Ah! but she hasn't," cried another; "I saw her photograph the other day at Mrs. Tredinnick's. She has one of the finest faces I ever saw. I fell in love with her as I saw it."

"By the way, do you know her, Rosevear?" said another. "She comes from Cornwall. Have you seen her?"

"Yes," said Merlin; "I knew her seven years ago or more; she was a girl of nineteen or twenty then, slim and pale. I used to think her very interesting. I didn't think she was brainy, though."

He tried to speak carelessly, but he could not conceal his eagerness.

"Mrs. Tredinnick is mighty proud of her niece, I can tell you. She talks of nothing else," said the young man who had spoken so enthusiastically.

"Do you say that she speaks freely about her?" asked Merlin. "She is mostly a close old party," he added.

"Most freely; she seems desirous for Miss Granville to meet decent fellows. She has invited me most cordially," he added, proudly.

When Merlin left the club, his feeling of interest in Helen Granville was intensified. "I'll go and see that old duenna,"

he cried. "I'll find out about her. I'll—— But no; I won't be a fool. Why should I care? She's nothing to me now—never can be. I'll drive her from my thoughts. I'll go home and work. I'll plan a novel that'll shock everybody. I'll—— Hi, cabby!"

"Yessir; where to, sir?"

"Russell Square."

"What did I say that for," he cried, savagely, as the horse trotted along the street. I'm worse than a boy of eighteen. But I'll see that old nuisance; I'll know about——"

He checked his thoughts and looked gloomily up Shaftesbury Avenue, angry with himself, yet eagerly looking forward to his visit.

Mrs. Tredinnick was at home, and greeted Merlin in her characteristic way. Although of Western extraction, and speaking with that soft intonation of voice peculiar to Cornish people, she was more Scotch by nature than Cornish. She possessed the gift of dry, caustic humour, and was sharp with her tongue. For years she had kept an open house for literary people, and always encouraged people who had brains. She was a keen-sighted old lady, though, and detected a sham more quickly than most people. As soon as Merlin's name began to be known, she had invited him to Russell Square, but she had never made a favourite of him. She did not quite understand him. Since he had written his later books, which the world had called *realistic*, she had ceased to invite him, and although there had been no open rupture between them, Merlin had felt that Mrs. Tredinnick did not belong to the list of his admirers.

"It's a long time since I've seen you, Mr. Rosevear," she said, in her plain-spoken way. "I suppose by this time you have another great book finished."

"I've been very idle lately," he said, quietly, wondering how he could best lead the conversation into channels whereby he might soften Mrs. Tredinnick's feelings towards him.

"'Ave the churches closed up and down the country?" she asked.

"I'm not aware of such a state of things," he replied.

"Neither have I heard that the marriage laws have been abolished, and that a kind of indiscriminate free love is the accepted order of society."

"I have not heard of it either."

"I was thinking they might be, after your great book," she said, sharply.

Mrs. Tredinnick was known to speak in this way to any one whose writings did not please her, so Merlin did not take umbrage. Besides, she was an elderly lady, known to be eccentric, and in spite of himself he wanted to be friendly with her.

"My great book has been sadly misunderstood, Mrs. Tredinnick."

"I hope it has been. However, it has done nearly all the mischief it is capable of doing now, I hope."

"I hope it has done no mischief at all."

"It is all wrong, Mr. Rosevear. It is a clever book, and all the worse for being clever. Forgive me for speaking so plainly. I am an old woman, and I've seen lots of writers go up like a rocket and come down like a stick. You've turned your cleverness into wrong channels. I suppose when you called the book 'The Failure of David's Son,' you meant the failure of Jesus Christ. Well, Jesus Christ will live after your foolishness is forgotten. I suppose it had a run for a few months, and now it is nearly forgotten."

"Oh, no; it is still selling rapidly."

"Well, I'm sorry for it. If ever a book was a failure, it is yours. If you think you are going to set the world right by that kind of thing you are mistaken, Mr. Rosevear. People tell me, however, that my niece's book, which, without preaching, builds up what you try and destroy, is being read everywhere."

"I am glad because of your niece's success. I congratulate you, too. When I saw the announcement in the *Imperial Observer*, I was delighted."

The old lady looked at him suspiciously.

"It wasn't you that wrote that review in the *Boomerang*, calling her book childish twaddle, then?"

"I never write reviews," said Merlin, flushing as he remembered the article which, in the bitterness of his soul, he had sent to the periodical she had mentioned.

"It is generally supposed to have been written by you."

"I am credited with a great deal of which I know nothing," replied Merlin, a little bitterly.

"Have you read 'Morning'?"

"Yes. I have read it. I think it delightful."

"But it is at the antipodes from your book, in teaching, in sentiment, in everything."

"Yes, it is; I'm glad of it."

"What?" and Mrs. Tredinnick looked at him curiously.

"Yes, I mean it; I am tired of so-called realism. I know I've been bitten by it; I know I have been called a disciple of Zola; well, those days are over. I shall never write another book like 'The Failure of David's Son.'"

He had never dreamed of saying this. Never until this morning had he thought of discarding realism. Why he talked in this way now he could scarcely explain, except that he wanted to be friendly with Mrs. Tredinnick.

"I'm very glad to hear it," she said, more cordially; then

she added, slowly, "Your wife is a realist. She wrote 'Hymen.'"

"Yes, she wrote 'Hymen.'"

"Is she well?"

"Yes; that is, she is fairly well. Not well enough to go into society, though. She keeps at home very much."

Mrs. Tredinnick's face cleared somewhat. She did not like his wife. She had avoided her when she was Miss Winthrop, and she did not encourage friendship when she became Mrs. Telford.

"You saw that the *Imperial Observer* said that Miss Helen Granville was coming to London, I suppose?"

"Yes, I saw. I congratulate you very heartily, Mrs. Tredinnick."

"I am very proud of my niece," said the old lady, in a very satisfied tone. "She will be much sought after when she comes to London."

"There can be no doubt of that."

For a few seconds he seemed to weigh his thoughts carefully, then he said, "I used to know Miss Granville, Mrs. Tredinnick."

"What?"

He repeated his statement.

"Oh," she said, "I remember now; of course, you came from Cornwall. You knew her, you say."

"Yes, slightly. That is a long time ago. I have not seen her for several years now."

"I never knew her to mention your name, that is—I don't know her myself, intimately—I have not seen her since she was a child. But she has never mentioned you in her letters."

"No, possibly. I left St. Endor shortly after Mr. Granville came to Creekavose. He was in a better social position than I." He added the last sentence nervously.

"Oh, yes; I see. Mr. Granville and myself have not——" She paused rather awkwardly, then she said, "Probably you would like to meet my niece."

"I should be delighted," said Merlin. He said this eagerly, and he spoke the truth, yet he dreaded the meeting which he longed for.

"I daresay your wish will be gratified," said the old lady, cautiously. "Of course she will be fêted a good deal, and you may be invited to meet her."

He felt the snub, felt it keenly; but he would not take offence. He felt that he could even bear taking a place second to Helen Granville.

Mrs. Tredinnick did not invite him to Russell Square, however. She seemed to distrust him, she was not genial and frank.

"When does Miss Granville come to London, Mrs. Tredinnick?" he added, presently.

"Next month; the third week in October. Yes, I'm looking forward to her coming with eagerness."

"Yes; I'll see her, I'll meet her alone," he said, as he walked along Gower Street a few minutes later; "I'll—I'll—but why should I? She's nothing to me—never can be now. No! I'll think no more about her. That chapter in my life's history is closed."

And yet as he walked along the street he formed all sorts of plans for meeting her, and that very night he took steps for carrying them into effect.

A month later, he discovered, by means known only to himself, that Mrs. Tredinnick had to leave her visitor alone in the house one morning, while she had to transact some important business in the city. Helen Granville had at that time been in London only a few days, and as yet had not appeared in society.

"I'll go and see her," said Merlin; "I'll get admission

somehow. Why I am such a fool I don't know; but I'll go."

He went to Russell Square, and watched Mrs. Tredinnick's house until he saw the old lady get into her carriage and drive away alone. Then, with a fast-beating heart, he went to the door, and rang the bell.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW MERLIN AND HELEN MET

HELEN GRANVILLE sat in Mrs. Tredinnick's library, at Russell Square alone. She had arrived in London a few days before, but, as we stated in the last chapter, had not appeared in public at all. For Helen was sensitive and nervous. She had never dreamed of being successful as an author, and her success had made her feel that her work was undeserving of so much praise. For a long time she had kept the fact of her writing a secret. She shrank from letting it be known that she contemplated publishing a book. The idea of writing came to her a few months after her engagement with Merlin Rosevear had been broken. It will be remembered that Merlin in his letter had mentioned that many of his views would be explained in his forthcoming book. When Helen saw the book announced she went to the nearest town and bought it, and had afterwards sat up all night to read it. The novel had at once pained her and inspired her. She had felt it to be gloomy, dangerous, and untrue. And then, as she saw the sun rise behind the hilltops, an idea for a story flashed into her mind. It came to her suddenly. Characters, situations, and the general outline all suggested themselves suddenly. The title, too, was decided upon at the same time. It had come to her at sunrise and so she called her book "Morning." The central idea, as we know, was entirely different

from the book she had been reading. Her lover had discarded her, given up his boyish ideals. She, who had been disappointed and discarded, would tell her dream of life. She did not then expect to publish it. She never dreamed that she could write anything good enough for a publisher to accept. Still she could write her dream; it would be something to interest her, something to help her to forget the man to whom she had given her heart.

She did not hurry over it. There was no need. She lingered over it lovingly. She did not expect that it would see the light of day, so she wrote boldly, telling of her best thoughts, her best hopes. The thought of critics never came into her mind, and so her work was not emasculated by seeking to earn their praise. She delighted in her work, too; it was no task which had to be finished by a certain date, no labour that was to be paid for by a publisher's cheque. Nearly two years elapsed between the time she wrote the first chapter and the day when she penned the last page. After that she put it away in a private drawer, never daring to send it to a publisher. She regarded it as a girlish dream, of great interest to her but of none to any one else, and so for some time it lay unheeded.

Presently Merlin's great book came out, and Helen, unable to forget him, secured a copy. Its gloomy power laid hold of her, its pessimism saddened her. It was a book more to be deplored than the one which had led her to write. She turned to the manuscript lying in the drawer and began to read what she had written, and for the first time she felt that it contained a message which the world needed. But even yet she dared not send it to a publisher. She remembered an old friend of her father's, who had been his solicitor in more prosperous days. He was a great reader, and he had obtained a practice in London. She determined to write him, telling him of what she had done,

and forwarding the MS. at the same time. She begged him to keep the matter a secret, as she did not wish her father to laugh at her foolishness. Moreover, if a publisher accepted it, she was so much afraid it would be a failure that she would not attach her name to it.

This solicitor, Mr. George Symons by name, had mistaken his profession. He did not love the law, he did love letters. He followed his calling, however, because it insured him an income, but his hobby was books. He was an omnivorous reader, and nothing came amiss to him. When Helen's letter came he laughed at the notion of her writing a novel. He knew of the thousands who wasted time and paper in such a way. He remembered her, too, as a bright, playful child. Still, he started to read her story.

When he had read a page he became interested, and by the time the first chapter was finished he had given several satisfactory grunts.

"The girl can write," he said, as he commenced the second chapter. "It promises splendidly," he cried, as he finished it.

The next day he took it to Mr. Frederick Gray and told him he had discovered something good. A few days later he received a letter accepting the story and offering a sum for the copyright.

A few weeks after its publication it became a success, and Helen's heart was made glad by the news that "Morning" was a famous book. She still felt sensitive about having her name connected with her work, however. She did not want publicity. She did not belong to the order of women who will do anything to advertise themselves.

When Vivian Gregory came to Cornwall she nearly told her secret, however. Once she had commenced to speak to him about it, but her father entered the room at the time and the sentence remained unspoken. Even to her

father she was silent about the matter, although she was strongly tempted to tell him of the means she intended to use to pay Squire Newlyn the money he had advanced on Creekavose. Indeed, the day after Vivian Gregory had left Cornwall she had gone to Truro, and had visited Lawyer Tremain, with a view of eliciting from him information concerning the exact condition of affairs. To her surprise, however, she was informed that the matter was arranged, and that Mr. Newlyn would no longer be able to trouble her father. On further inquiry as to the name of the person who had befriended them, the old lawyer was very reticent, and while Helen left his office with a light heart, she was sorely puzzled as to who could be their benefactor.

Presently, however, she thought it wise to acquaint her publisher as to her identity, and at the same time she wrote to Mrs. Tredinnick, informing her that she was the author of "Morning." Mrs. Tredinnick was delighted. She had often wanted Helen to come to London, and was much chagrined when she had written saying that she could not leave her father. Now, however, she wrote in the warmest terms, insisting on an early visit.

Thus it was that Helen came to London, the city so kind to the successful, but too often terribly cruel to the weak and struggling.

"You know Merlin Rosevear, don't you, Helen?" said Mrs. Tredinnick, the day after she arrived.

"I used to know him, aunt."

"Well, what do you think of him?"

Helen was slightly confused. She expected that she would probably meet Merlin, and had been schooling herself to be calm, but she could not stop the blood from rushing to her face at the mention of his name.

"I hardly know what I think of him," she said, with downcast eyes.

"Of course not," said the old lady, "I was foolish to ask. I remember your father's opinion about associating with people of a lower social position than himself. And Rosevear was poor. He is a great man now, although he is losing his power—of that I am sure."

"Do you know anything wrong concerning him?" asked Helen.

"Not what the world would call wrong. He is simply a time-server, that is all. He is one of those who are determined to succeed, at whatever costs. He has, I should judge, an iron will, and everything must bend to him. I don't think he is happy, though."

"No?"

"How can he be? He gives up everything for success. But there, it is no use talking about him. Still, he told me the other day that he was tired of so-called realism. What he meant by it I don't know. I don't understand him."

On the morning when Mrs. Tredinnick had left her to go into the city, Helen sat in the library thinking of Merlin. She could not forget her early dream—she could not forget that she had promised to be his wife. It is true he had abused her confidence, he had discarded the dreams of his youth, ay. he had married some one else; and yet Helen could not forget him. He had somehow become interwoven with her innermost life, and she could not drive him from her mind.

It was the elder Dumas, I think, who said that love without respect was a bird with only one wing. This may be so, and yet a true woman's love is not easily destroyed. Thus it was that, in spite of herself, she thought of Merlin, not as one to whom she could ever bear a close relationship, but as one who had won her heart years before.

A servant entered the room bearing a card tray.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, miss."

"Wishes to see me?"

"Yes, miss. I told him that Mrs. Tredinnick had just gone out and would not be back until lunch; then he asked for you, and said he wished to see you very particular."

"His name?"

The servant, for the second time, presented the tray, on which a card lay.

"Merlin Rosevear," she read.

The blood rushed to her face, and for a moment she lost control of herself. She shrunk from telling the servant that she could not see him, and she dreaded to meet him alone.

"Shall I show him in, miss?"

"Yes."

The word passed her lips before she knew, and she could not recall it. She sat back in her chair and tried to compose herself. Why did he wish to see her? What should she say to him when he came? What would he say to her?

She had not long to wait; a few seconds later the door opened, and Merlin Rosevear stood in the room. She lifted her eyes and looked at him curiously, feeling strangely calm as she did so, yet she knew that every nerve in her body was at full tension. To some it is a light matter to meet an old lover, but Helen did not feel it to be so; neither did Merlin. His lips twitched, his hands trembled.

It was a few seconds before either spoke, during which time each regarded the other curiously. She noticed that he had become a handsome man of the world. His clothes were faultless, his face bore the look of one who lived an intellectual life. The country youth that she had loved had gone; the pale, distinguished-looking man of letters, one who had conquered a great public, stood in his place. It

was the same man, and yet it was another. There was nothing coarse, nothing repulsive in his face. No one could think of him as being under a ban of any sort, and yet it was not the Merlin that she had loved.

Merlin also saw a change in Helen, but not so much. Her form had become more perfectly developed, her face told of a reposeful strength which he did not remember in the old days; but she looked scarcely older than when he had won her heart. And yet there was a flash in her eyes which told him that she was no longer an inexperienced girl. Even at that time he realised that his picture of a buxom country girl was false. He had fancied lately that as a boy he had idealised her, and that when he saw her again with the eyes of experience, he should wonder how he ever cared for her. Helen Granville was more beautiful than he had thought she could be. It was a pure, noble face on which he looked; not beautiful as some call beautiful, but it was a fine face—the face of a noble, cultured woman.

He spoke first, and his voice was tremulous.

"Forgive me for calling," he said; "but I could not help it."

"Why do you wish to see me?" she asked.

"Why?" he cried, and there was a touch of passion in his voice. "I hardly know why. When I knew you were coming I felt I must hear your voice again, see you again, and, if I might, ask forgiveness for my past folly."

"Surely you need not have called for that. You took your own course years ago. I released you according to your wish; I bear you no enmity. Doubtless you did for the best."

"Nay, I did not. I was a fool—a blind fool. Everything has been different to me since that fatal letter. Literature has been different, work has been different, the world has been different. If I caused you pain, I have

caused myself a thousand times more. I don't know whether you have suffered or no, but I have suffered more than words can say."

The sound of his voice affected her strangely. To her it seemed as if some one had come back from the dead. It brought back old scenes, old memories; it made her think of the time when he pleaded for her love. Her heart was stirred now, even as it was stirred then. For a moment she could not speak; she felt as though the years of loneliness were a painful dream, that a life long departed had come back to her heart. His power over her was not gone. Had he come to her satisfied, haughty, proud of the position he had won, and laughing at the foolishness of his past, she would have been able to steel her heart against him. But he was humble, repentant, sorrowful. At that minute he was the Merlin of olden times—Merlin needing inspiration, courage, love.

"Is it any wonder, then, that I should call?" he went on; "is it any wonder that I have longed to see you? I went to Cornwall for that purpose only. But there, the past is past, and I must pay throughout my life the bitter price of my mad folly."

By this time Helen was herself again. She remembered that Merlin had cut the knot which bound them, that he had, long after he had written her the letter asking to be released, married another woman. She remembered, too, the books he had written—books which pandered to that which was depraved and sordid, and she felt that if those books were any index to his thoughts and character he was a man to be avoided rather than loved.

"I am sorry your life is not happy," she said, quietly; "but surely you have obtained what you coveted. You have won a better position than you dared to expect. You are rich, popular, almost famous."

"It has all become like Dead Sea fruit," he cried. "The joy I expected has never been realised, the satisfaction which I expected to come from success I have never felt. Besides, my power is departing, my enthusiasm has gone. My heart never burns because of a new idea as it used to do. I can't write like I did, I seem to have become *blasé*, and unsusceptible to that which makes life a reality. For months I have been trying to write a new book, but I can't. I've no doubt I could produce an ordinary melodramatic novel, or a cynical tale full of biting epigram. But my power to arouse, to inspire is gone, for the simple reason that I am never inspired myself."

He had no intention of talking like this when he entered the room, but somehow Helen's presence made him. He was not altogether sincere in what he said; for the most part he was acting, and yet he knew that in speaking of his lost power he was telling the truth. Never as now did that fact stare him in the face. He had become sordid, and a sordid mind never enters the realm of true art. Literature was to him simply a means whereby his ambition might be satisfied, and it had paid him in his own coin. He had made it a trade, a commercial and social enterprise, and so while it had brought him money and position, it had ceased to bring him an artist's joy. He had been gaining the world and losing his soul, and in losing his soul he had been losing the power to write. For nature is its own avenger, and he who would make literature a mere trade, becomes blind to the vision of the seer, and deaf to the voice of Divinity. And standing before Helen Granville he felt it as he had never felt it before.

"I am sorry for that," said Helen. She felt this to be a strange channel in which to lead their conversation after the lapse of so many years, and in spite of herself she pitied the successful man who stood before her. "Perhaps," she

continued, "this is only a passing experience. Your power will, perhaps, come back to you."

"It may," he said, his eyes flashing as though a new idea had entered his mind—"it may if circumstances are right. Miss Granville," and his voice became pleading, "nay, may I not call you Helen, for the sake of old days?"

"I wish you to forget that name," she said.

"I can never forget it," he cried, passionately, "but I will never breathe it save to myself. I was going to say this, however—I am a parasite in many respects. I must lean on some one. I must draw inspiration and receive strength from some one outside myself. Lately the world has been saying that the best work I ever did was when I wrote 'Lovelight.' Why is that? Who inspired 'Lovelight'? It was you. One day I was starving, I had scarcely eaten anything for days. Then one of your letters came, full of help and purity and inspiration. 'Lovelight' came to me as I read it, came in a second; I sat down directly I had finished what you had written and wrote a draft of the story. No part of it was laboured—how could it be? It was an inspiration!"

"I am glad I helped you," she said, speaking quietly with an effort, "but that is all over. The tie that existed between us is broken. I ought not to permit this interview now; indeed, I should not but for the fact that we must be strangers in the future."

"Strangers! No, it must not be. That is——" He hesitated a second, and then went on speaking again. "I did my best work when I was constantly thinking of you and my work has deteriorated as your influence over me became less. I know it is so, in spite of the fact that I have gained popularity by unholy means. Even now 'Lovelight' sells best among all my books. I know I sacrificed you. I was blind, senseless, mad! I was like Esau: I sold my birth-

right—my more than birthright—for what I thought would bring me name and position. Well, I am paying the penalty!"

"I repeat that I am sorry this should be so, but I do not see the use of our talking longer. Surely it can bring you no joy to recount these things, and—and it is painful to me."

"Oh, I grieve that it pains you, and yet I do not speak without a purpose. How can I? I am a young man; I have scarcely reached my prime, even physically. How can I? A young man of thirty is only just beginning his life, and nothing can be sadder than that any one of thirty should lose his power. Well, I want it to come back. I want my early inspirations, I want to dream my early dreams. Who can help me? You can help me—only you. That is why I want your friendship again, that is why I want to realise your influence. I know I am asking much; I know you would be justified if you scorned me, refused to recognise me in any way. But you have a noble, forgiving nature. You are not one to bear malice. You will help even those who have wronged you."

"You make a strange request, Mr. Rosevear!" cried Helen, her eyes flashing, and her face becoming pale.

"I know I do; but I speak as one who is desperate. I scorn, I loathe myself for acting as I have acted. I am paying the penalty, the bitter penalty. What is my popularity worth to me, what my money? I would gladly give it up—ay, a thousand times—to feel what I felt that night when- -when—you know—down close to the sea you told me you loved me."

"I cannot allow this, Mr. Rosevear. I forbid you to recall the past in this way. Our interview must come to an end."

"Spare me a few minutes longer. I know we can never be as we were. I know it! God! does not the thought

sting me like scorpions! But will you not help me to make the most of my life? I want to live above sordid thoughts and sordid hopes. Will you not help me? Will you not give me your friendship—only your friendship? Will you not let me see you sometimes so that I may be helped by your presence? Will you not bring back to me the inspiration of years ago?"

"This is foolishness, mere foolishness, Mr. Rosevear. What you have lost you have not lost in a day. It has been a gradual lowering of your life. Evidently you were not satisfied with what you had, or you would not have given it up so readily."

"Oh, but I was mad, blind!"

"That may be. It is not for me to say. But if you will win back what you have lost, you must have other help than mine. We can give only what we are. Our work is ourselves. If what you say is true, you must be a new man before you can do new work. I cannot give you new life. In your last book you confess to your having given up your religion; but only God can give new life."

"Yes, but God uses human means. He works through men and women."

"Possibly; but if that is so, I am not the chosen instrument. It is impossible that it should be so. You must seek other means. You—you have a wife!"

He started to his feet, and walked impatiently across the room.

"Wife!" he cried, bitterly. "Yes, I have a wife, I have a wife; that is, I have linked my life to a woman. It is all a part of my madness. I seemed to be bent upon destroying myself, and I have done it. I wanted position, wealth, and I've got it—I've got it! I have gained the world, and—oh! Miss Granville, pity me if you can do nothing else! How can I get back my boyish visions when I have to live

with the woman who wrote 'Hymen'? Can't you see how impossible it is for me to rise unaided, while day by day the only woman's influence that surrounds me is of a nature to lead me further away from old faiths and old ideals?"

"You must have changed indeed," said Helen, with a touch of scorn in her voice, "if you can speak ill of the woman you have married—and to another woman."

"I have changed, but I long for the better, the truer. Surely I am not asking much—simply that we may be friends, simply that we may meet occasionally, and that from you I may learn the better way. I feel the better for your society even now. I never longed, as I do at this moment, to be a better man so that I might do better work. Who has created the longing? You. To be in your society is to live in a new atmosphere; it is to have new hopes and new visions. At this moment I loathe the teaching of my last book, and you have made me loathe it. Can you not promise?"

"I can promise nothing now," said Helen. "I may not stay here long; I am not settled as to my plans. Besides, I am not sure that it will be well for us to meet again."

"But you forgive me for the past?"

"Forgive; yes."

"And you do not scorn me?"

"I am sorry that you should have sacrificed your best hopes and desires."

"And you will help me—you will be my friend? Believe me, I regard you as the purest, best woman in the world. Let me see you sometimes." He spoke pleadingly, and his voice was tremulous.

"I cannot promise now. I wish you well; I would help my enemies if it lay in my power."

"Thank you—oh!" He stopped suddenly. "I have

not congratulated you on your book. It is a beautiful story; it is worthy of you. I should like to speak to you about it when we meet again. I am too excited now. But I may some time, may I not?"

"If we meet again; but I am not sure that we ever shall. I do not think it would be well."

"Oh, it will, it will. Thank you for being kind." He held out his hand.

"Good morning," he said. "Thank you so much."

"Good morning."

Their eyes met for a second, then she drew her hand away, and rang the bell.

When Merlin Rosevear had reached the end of the square he realised that he was consumed with a great passion for Helen Granville. His old love for her was intensified tenfold. It was not like the love of years ago; it was more cautious, more selfish; but it was love. He felt that he would give heaven and earth, did he possess them, to win back the love she once bore for him.

He hurried back to his house and, having locked himself in the study, tried to understand his position. At that moment the loss of his power to write was as nothing compared with the loss of Helen Granville. And he was bound —bound hand and foot.

"What shall I do?" he cried. "What steps shall I take? Let me think my way through this. Let me see whether my bonds cannot be broken. No, I am lost to joy. I am bound for ever."

But he pondered for a long time, revolving in his mind plan after plan.

CHAPTER XXX

MADNESS

FOR several days after his interview with Helen Granville, Merlin made no attempt to work. He knew it would be no use. His mind was full of plans, conjectures, hopes, fears. He knew that it was his duty to exorcise the fiend that was tempting him, but duty was not a word that bore a strong meaning to him. Besides, his heart was torn with passion, and day by day the flame of his love seemed to be fanned.

Time after time he repeated his conversation with Helen Granville to himself, time after time did he recall the look in her eyes as she bade him good morning. He remembered the quiver in her hand as she placed it in his, and the way she suddenly pulled it away.

"She loves me still! She loves me still!" he would cry with delight, and then bemoan the fact that he had discarded the one whom he felt he would give the world to call his wife.

"And I am married," he would repeat, "married to one who stood by the river's brink when I first saw her, contemplating suicide. I am married to a woman who I believe, in spite of all she can say, has a past, and who says she wants to be young." And then he would laugh bitterly and angrily as the hopelessness of his situation appeared to him.

All this made him act coldly, and almost cruelly to his

wife. He gave her neither smile nor kind word. He was gloomy and morose in her presence. He repulsed every advance she made.

"What is the matter with you, Merlin? Why do you treat me like this?" she asked one day.

"Like what?"

"So heartlessly, so unlovingly?"

"Well, I never professed to love you, did I?"

"Why did you marry me, then?"

"Because I was——bah!" he broke off suddenly with a bitter laugh.

"Merlin, don't treat me like this—what ails you?"

"Nothing."

"Merlin, tell me honestly, do you regret marrying me?"

"What is the use of talking about that? We are married, and as we are both well-behaved folk, I suppose we shall have to remain man and wife."

"Is the thought disagreeable to you?"

"Nonsense."

"It seems to me to be far from nonsense. You've been a changed man lately. If you do not wish to live with me, I can live alone. I think you would like it."

He was silent.

"If," she went on, "if you married that Cornish girl, would you act towards her like this?" She was of a jealous turn of mind, and that jealousy was aroused.

"I forbid you to mention her," he said, angrily.

"And why, pray?"

"Because your world and hers are different. She—she—" he stopped suddenly, feeling he had said far too much.

"Oh, I see, your old love has come back, has it?"

"Stop, I tell you!"

His wife's eyes gleamed with anger, her face became drawn and haggard.

"Beware, Merlin Rosevear," she cried. "I am not a woman to be treated lightly. If—if," and then she concluded the sentence in a whisper.

"Don't be a fool!" he cried. "You must be mad, I think. You know nothing of the woman of whom you are jealous. She's incapable of what you hint at. She's as unapproachable as an Alpine peak. She's proud, too, as proud as Lucifer. I discarded her years ago, and now I doubt if she would speak to me even if I met her."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do, worse luck," he replied, bitterly.

His wife saw that he spoke the truth, and became silent. Presently she said, "Merlin, are you tired of me? Do you wish you had never married me? Tell me."

He opened his mouth as if to speak, but he did not answer her. Leaving the room hurriedly, he put on his hat and overcoat, and walked towards the city, leaving his wife with a sad, despairing look on her face.

"Oh, life is a terrible thing," she moaned, "if I could only believe as Merlin's mother believes, if—if—but what is the use? I was reared in an atmosphere antagonistic to faith, or anything akin. But I cannot live long like this, no I cannot."

Meanwhile, Merlin walked towards the city. "I shall just be in time to meet the fellows at the Restaurant," he said, looking at his watch. "I must have a chat with somebody, perhaps Gregory will be there. He's not much in my line, but I should like a few minutes with him alone. He may be able to let me know what is going on."

He spent a few minutes chatting with men he knew, but they were mostly connected with papers and had to get back to their offices. They spoke of nothing to interest him, and so he decided to leave.

"I'll go to Gregory's club," he thought, "and if he's not there I'll take a cab to his diggings."

He found his way to the smoking-room of the club of which Gregory was a member, and, to his delight, saw him in an alcove by the side of the fire, talking with a seedy-looking young man whom he did not know.

"Hello, Rosevear," cried Gregory, "come on, here's an empty chair. Let me introduce you to one of your county men. This is Mr. Merlin Rosevear, Mr. Pascoe."

The young man named Pascoe looked at Rosevear with a solemn, awed expression.

"My friend Pascoe has literary aspirations," said Gregory.

"Give it up, my lad," said Merlin, "the game's not worth the candle."

"It's enabled you to pay for your candles, anyhow," responded the young man.

"Well done, Pascoe," laughed Gregory.

"And what are you doing?" said Merlin, wishing he would go, so that he might be able to talk with Gregory alone.

"Oh, I do a bit of reporting for a living," laughed Pascoe, comically, "and I've written two novels."

"And what prospects have you?"

"Well, I'm looking out for a publisher who's likely to fail," laughed Pascoe, merrily. Evidently his seedy clothes did not make him sad.

"What good would he do for you?"

"Well, you see, prosperous publishers will have nothing to do with me. Possibly some fellow on the brink of bankruptcy might. I've heard that such men are eager to pounce upon a work of genius, to save them from disaster."

"Well, and are yours works of genius?"

"Oh, no. Still one of them might take my work on

spec. Of course, it would do him no good; but if he failed, or refused to pay me, I could write to the papers, showing how a genius had been nipped in the bud. I should arouse sympathy and so get my chance," and Pascoe laughed at his joke.

"Not a bad idea," replied Merlin.

"Well, I must be off now. I've a meeting dealing with Mission to the Jews to report this afternoon."

"What are you doing with him?" asked Merlin, when he was gone.

"Oh, I give him a dinner occasionally. He is a good-hearted lad, and he'll do something some day, of that I'm sure. He's a pure-minded fellow, too, and always cheerful."

"And are you going to try and get him a publisher?"

"Possibly. He is trying hard against tremendous odds."

Merlin lit a cigar, thinking while he did so how best he should approach the subject nearest to his heart.

"Have you seen Miss Granville since she came to London?" he asked presently.

"Not yet. I'm going to meet her to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes; Mrs. Tredinnick has invited me to a quiet evening to meet a few friends. Are you going?"

"No; I'm not invited."

Gregory looked relieved.

"I saw her a few days since," said Merlin, presently.

"You saw her?"

"Yes; is there anything strange in that?"

"I—I don't know. Only I shouldn't have thought you would care to—to come into contact with her."

"Why not?"

"Well—the past, and your relations to her in the bygone

days would, I should have thought, placed a barrier between you. Perhaps you met her by accident, though?"

"Oh, no; I called at Russell Square."

"And she received you?"

"Certainly. Kindly too. It was a strange sensation to me. I can't imagine how I screwed up courage to ask to see her. But I did. She more than fulfils the dreams of my boyhood. We had an hour's chat alone. Mrs. Tredinnick was not at home, so our talk was uninterrupted."

He spoke with a calm assurance which tantalised Gregory beyond words. Why should the man, who had discarded her, seek to meet her? He felt as though he would like to twist Merlin's neck.

"Does your wife know of your meeting?" he asked, presently.

"No; by Jove! no. It would never do. Of course, Miss Granville was as cold as an icicle, but she hasn't forgot the past, I imagine."

"But you will forget it if you are an honourable man."

"Why should I? I have been a fool. The thought of Helen Granville is the purest influence of my life. Why should I seek to forget the past? Nay, she inspires me to start on a new course; she brings back the feeling which inspired 'Lovelight.'"

He kept his eyes on Gregory as he spoke, and watched the emotion that expressed itself on his face.

"Old Granville is hard up, I suppose," he went on presently. "You heard the gossip, I dare say?"

"Well, what of that?"

"I was only wondering. Gregory, who is the man that has arranged to pay Newlyn the money he has advanced on Creekavose?"

The blood rushed to Gregory's face, as though he had been detected in doing a mean act.

"I called on Tremain, and offered to arrange for the matter myself," went on Merlin; "but he told me that I had been forestalled. You did it, didn't you? I thought so."

"Why should I?"

"Oh, there are plenty of reasons why you should. You needn't try and deny it; your face reveals the fact that you are found out."

"Then respect my secret, Rosevear. I wouldn't for her to know it on any account. I told Tremain to be silent; it would seem mean to let her know, bearing in mind the fact that I asked her to marry me. It would seem like an underhanded way of trying to buy her love."

"Yes, it would," said Merlin, decidedly. "It would never do for you to let her know—for a long time anyhow. If you feel sensitive about it I will take your bargain, and pay you the money."

"No," said Gregory, decidedly.

"Oh, well, it's all right." A strange light flashed into Merlin's eyes as though a new thought had struck him.

"Well, I must be going," said Gregory, at length; "I have an engagement in Paternoster Row in half an hour."

"Have you? And then, of course, you want to prepare for to-night. Well, I wish you luck, old chap."

"There is no luck for me, Rosevear, none at all. Still I anticipate a pleasant evening."

He wanted to talk with Merlin further about his meeting with Helen; he wanted him to repeat what they had said, for a gnawing pain was at his heart. But something checked him from asking questions; it seemed sacrilege to talk about it.

"He's badly bitten," said Merlin, when he had gone. "badly, but evidently regards the affair as hopeless. Oh, what a fool I have been, a blind, helpless fool! What is

the use of all my scheming? I am bound hand and foot. I believe she loves me still, and I—I love her in spite of all my sneers about love. My God! I'd move heaven and earth to remove obstacles; but it's no use—no use."

"I'm glad I've found out that about Gregory though," he went on, presently; "it may come useful to me; he's not the fellow to tell, neither is Tremain. Yes, I may as well make use of it; but what's the good? I am married to a woman who was old from her birth, and who wants to be young. Bah! But there, I'll think about it, and make the most of it."

That night Vivian Gregory went to Russell Square, and met Helen Granville. There was a wistful look in his eyes as he held out his hand to her. He had parted with her on the lawn in front of Creekavose House, his heart was heavy, for she had told him that it was impossible for her to ever care for him. Then he knew her only as Helen Granville, an obscure country girl; now he met her as the author of "Morning," as one to whom the best life of London had held out hands of welcome.

Her greeting was kind, however, and she was just as unaffected as when they had walked the sandy beach while the waves rippled at their feet. But they spent a very little time together. Helen's society was much sought after; the author of "Morning" was not to be monopolised by one visitor. Still Gregory felt a strange happiness in being near her; it became a joy to him to see her courted and admired by some of the most distinguished people in London. He was the last guest to leave the house, and received a very cordial invitation from Mrs. Tredinnick to call often.

"I am supposed to be engaged on Wednesday afternoons," said the old lady, cordially, "but I am 'at home' then to people I like. Come, Mr. Gregory, both Miss Granville and I will be delighted to see you."

And Helen seconded the invitation. She did not love Vivian Gregory as he wanted to be loved—she felt she could never love again—but she admired him very much. She knew he was a true man, and one to be trusted. There was a suggestion of strength in his presence, and she knew that Mrs. Tredinnick described him correctly when she spoke of him as "a manly man."

"I'll not give up hope," mused Gregory, as he drove to his lodgings that night; "and I've no other alternative than to wait. Monte Cristo said that the whole philosophy of life was summed up in the two words—wait and hope. Well, I must wait. Ay, and I'll hope, too."

Merlin, however, felt in a different frame of mind. He could not content himself to do what he believed to be right and then calmly wait events. His was an active nature. His motto had been like that of the Norseman's of old time: "If there is not a way, make it." He had not hesitated as the choice of means either, especially in later years. He had said, "I will make a position, I will reach the goal of my desires," and to do this he had cast aside many things which were once dear to him. Now he realised that he had done unwisely. He had defeated his own ends. That which he had discarded in order to gain what he desired appeared to him as the pearl of great price. He had given up Helen Granville's love, ay, he believed he had destroyed his love for her. He had lived for position, and now the fruits of his effort were like the proverbial apples which grow in the region of the Sea of Death.

He loved Helen Granville, and he was tired of his wife!

Those two facts pressed themselves upon him with painful force. Moreover, while he felt he could not do without his popularity, it brought him no joy; and, besides all this, he realised less and less joy in his work. He could still write, he could still plan and scheme, but his heart, his soul refused

to respond to the action of his mind. He felt unable to put any heart into his work, and he knew that without it a great work was impossible. He knew that the failure of his last book was due to this. It had sold at first because it was daring, unconventional, and, in many respects, unclean. He knew that there was always a public hungry for a sensation, and so they had bought his story; but the sale of the book had ceased because it lacked the breath of true life. It had no perennial interest like such works as "The Vicar of Wakefield" and "John Halifax." It pulled down, but it did not build up; it appealed to the poor in human nature, and not to the noble. There was a time when he could speak to the best in life, but that time was gone. He had destroyed his power by abusing it.

And yet he loved Helen Granville! But it was not like the love of his boyhood; it was coarser, it was calculating. But it *was* love, and he knew it.

He thought of all this and more after Gregory had left. He was a member of the club, and so sat unmolested. Presently he was aroused from his reverie by a cheery voice.

"Well, Rosevear, you do look comfortable."

It was the editor of the *Boomerang* who spoke to him. He rejoiced in the euphonious name of Peter Belcher, and was on good terms with everybody.

"It's lucky I have happened to see you," said Belcher, after they had exchanged greetings; "things are going badly with us."

"But the *Boomerang* is paying, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's paying all right, better than ever—in fact. The personal nature of the paper has made it extremely interesting, and it's bought eagerly. It's this way. Rodgers, as you know, is the chief money man in the thing; he has financed it."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, by some means or other, he's hard up and wants to realise."

"Well, if the paper is as you say, he should have no difficulty in doing that."

"No, but here's the rub. He's negotiating with Brooks to buy him out. Well, Brooks is a clever fellow, but a bit of a prig. He doesn't approve of the way I've edited it. If Brooks gets it, out I go; he'll either edit himself, or he'll put one of his own sort in the chair."

"I'm very sorry, but—but if Brooks is negotiating, I don't see how it can be helped."

"But it can—in this way. You have plenty of money—buy it. I've been of service to you in the past, Rosevear, and if you got this thing practically in your own hands I could be of greater service in the future. I always feel that a popular author like you *ought* to have a paper in his own hands. It needn't become known, and I could make it pay you well—in many ways," he added, significantly.

Merlin Rosevear sat for a few minutes in perfect silence, and Belcher, who knew his habits, did not think it wise to disturb him.

Presently Merlin turned on Belcher, and asked him many keen, searching questions. These were answered without hesitation, and to Merlin's seeming satisfaction.

"The truth is," said Belcher, presently, "Rodgers doesn't want his financial position to be known. If Brooks gets it, there will be such a change in the whole thing that the truth is almost sure to leak out. You say you don't wish your name to be associated with the paper. So much the better. Rodgers will still be regarded as the owner, while you will be able to control it."

"I'll see Rodgers about it," said Merlin, after they had talked some time. "It may be worth while; but I'll not promise anything yet, except that I'll consider it."

'Yes, I'll do it," was Merlin's decision, as he sat alone in his study some hours afterwards—"I'll do it. It will be a safe speculation even from a financial point of view, and to own the *Boomerang* will be an advantage to me in many ways—*many* ways. Belcher is just the man, too, just the man I should have chosen. He can write a careful paragraph, and he knows the law of libel. He can manipulate words so that they can mean anything. Besides, he'll do anything I tell him. Yes, I'll do it."

During the next few weeks Merlin met with Helen Granville on several occasions. The author of "Morning" was fêted on several occasions, and Merlin was invited to meet her. His wife, however, never came. She had lately become so ill that a doctor had been sent for.

"What is the matter with her?" Merlin asked the doctor after his second visit.

"It is very difficult to tell, Mr. Rosevear," he replied. "There seems nothing organically wrong with her, and yet her life appears to be ebbing away. I can discover no reason for this, except that she seems to have lost all interest in everything. She suffers from melancholia, and looks at everything through a dark medium."

"What would you suggest, then?"

"You must use every effort to keep her cheerful. Don't let her be alone. Of course, I know that your many duties call you away from her, but secure cheerful companions for her. Above all things, don't let her brood."

"I will do my best," said Merlin. "I will arrange for her to have the most cheerful companions that can be got."

"There is another thing I feel I ought to tell you," said the doctor. "I knew your wife as a baby, I knew her mother. Mrs. Winthrop did not die a natural death."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there are strong reasons for believing that she committed suicide."

"Indeed, I never heard. Madness?"

"Scarcely; but melancholia. You must be careful of your wife, Mr. Rosevear."

Merlin thought of her as he saw her by the river, and could scarcely repress a shudder. "I will be careful, doctor," he said, slowly. "I wish you could suggest a companion for her—some motherly woman, now, a nurse and a companion at the same time."

"Yes, I think I can help you; but be with her all you can yourself. She thinks more of your society than of everything else. That is natural, of course."

"I will bear your words in mind, doctor. You shall be obeyed."

And so Merlin went into society alone. He was very reticent about his wife, simply saying that she was in a very nervous condition, and not fit to leave her room.

Towards Helen Granville he was almost reverential in his demeanour.

"You have no idea the good you do me," he said to her one evening. "Life is different when I talk with you. You always make me think of the best and the noblest; you inspire me as you did in the old days. I think I shall be able to write like I did in the days of 'Lovelight,' only better."

His manner was strangely subdued, too. He no longer poured forth cynical raillery as of old time; he seemed more earnest, more sincere.

"There is a change coming over Merlin Rosevear, Helen," said Mrs. Tredinnick to her niece one evening. "I think, after all, he must be a good fellow at heart. No doubt but his wife has had a bad influence on him."

"What sort of a woman is his wife?"

"A strange woman. I've heard that she, too, has



changed lately, but I've known her as a free-thinking, advanced woman. She wrote 'Hymen,' you know, and another book called 'Adam and Eve.' They are abominable productions. I liked Merlin Rosevear when I saw him first, but I got to distrust him. However, he seems very susceptible to the influences by which he is surrounded, and certainly I think you do him good."

Helen thought long about Mrs. Tredinnick's words. She remembered Merlin as she used to know him years ago, she called to mind what he had said at their first meeting, and she pitied him. Besides, her pride forbade her to resent his treatment; consequently, when next she met him, she spoke with less restraint.

All this increased his love for her. Her very presence forbade his love, and yet he felt that his boyish ardour was nothing to the consuming passion he felt for her now. Her conversation made him struggle against his feelings, and yet they increased in strength. Moreover, he spoke truly when he said that she made life different. In spite of everything she did inspire him with truer hopes and desires.

"With her by my side I could do everything," he would muse, "but it is too late, I suppose. I've thrown away my chance. I won her, and then discarded her. Oh! my God, what a fool, what a detestable idiot I have been!" And then he would brood hour after hour over his folly, and make plans for the future.

When next they met he caused Helen to feel more kindly towards him than ever. Their meeting took place in St. James's Park. Mrs. Tredinnick had gone to an afternoon concert in a hall near, and Helen said she preferred a walk in the Park. The day was cold and frosty, and she wanted to be in the open air. After some persuasion Mrs. Tredinnick yielded to her wishes, and Helen had scarcely entered the Park when she met Merlin Rosevear,

CHAPTER XXXI

THE EDGE OF THE PRECIPICE

"MAY I walk with you, Miss Granville?" asked Merlin, when they had exchanged greetings. "I shall be delighted if you will allow me."

Scarcely realising what she did, she consented, and they walked towards Buckingham Palace.

"Mrs. Rosevear is better, I hope?" said Helen, after they had gone a few steps.

"No, she is no better," he said, in a strange, hard voice; "the doctor gives but little hope of her recovery."

"Is her illness dangerous, then? I am so sorry."

"Not dangerous in the way you mean. She may live for many months. I know I can trust you not to repeat what I say, Miss Granville. The doctor regards my wife as mad."

"Mad!"

"Not violent. Melancholy mad. Her mother committed suicide; I am afraid my wife inherits the taint from her mother."

Helen was silent.

"It's not a cheerful subject, is it? Let's talk of something else."

"I am very, very sorry for you, Mr. Rosevear."

"Thank you; your sympathy is more to me than I can say."

He spoke the words very quietly. He seemed to regard her as a friend, a kind friend.



"But we will not talk of that," he went on. "I heard from Cornwall to-day, Miss Granville; my mother told me that she saw your father a few days ago. He looked wonderfully well and happy, she said."

"Yes, he is very well. I heard from him yesterday. I shall see him soon now."

"Why, is he coming to London?"

"No, I am going home."

"Going to Cornwall!" He said this as though the news gave him a shock.

"Yes; there is nothing wonderful in my going home, is there?"

"No, I suppose not. And Creekavose is a very pretty place. It will be a welcome change to you after the rush of London. Still London has received you with much warmth, it has given you a great welcome. Not but what you have deserved it, of course. The position you have gained demanded it."

"You are very kind. Yes, London has been more generous to me than I have deserved, and I love the life here very much. Still, home is home, and my father needs me."

"There was some gossip about your leaving Creekavose," he said, looking steadfastly on the ground. I suppose there is no truth in it?"

She looked at him as though a new thought had struck her; a question sprang to her lips, but something kept her from asking it at that moment.

The truth was she could not forget the past. Years had passed away, it is true, but she could not help thinking of the time when they had walked together as lovers; she had been his promised wife, while his words of love had been poured into her ears. And now she walked with him as a comparative stranger; he was married to another woman, and yet she was strangely interested in him.

"No," she said, presently; "we do not intend lea
Creekavose."

"I am glad for that," he replied; "you must natu
love the place very much."

"I do," she replied; then a look of decision came
her eyes. "Mr. Rosevear," she continued, "you hea
suppose, that Creekavose was to be taken from us? It
common gossip, I believe."

"I did hear something about it. I am glad there i
necessity now."

"You heard, I suppose, that my home and the
surrounding it was mortgaged to Mr. Newlyn?"

"Yes; pray don't disturb yourself, Miss Gran
Villagers' gossip is not worth considering."

"But there is something else. Some one went to
Tremain and arranged for the money to be paid when
notice expired. I asked Mr. Tremain who our friend
but he would not tell me. Perhaps you heard of this?

Merlin was silent.

"Do you know who our benefactor was?"

He still refrained from speaking, but kept looking ste
on the ground.

"There was really no danger," she went on; "I c
easily have arranged about the money had there been
need. My literary work has been such a success that
publishers would gladly have advanced what was necess
Indeed, I went to Truro to make settlements about
matter. I found, however, that the business was compl
—some one, not knowing the whole of the facts of the c
had placed a sufficient amount in Mr. Tremain's ha
You know who that some one was, don't you, Mr. R
vear?"

"I would rather not speak about it," said Me
huskily.



"But I want to know; are you not our benefactor? Did you not go to Mr. Tremain?"

"I went—certainly; but I do not wish——" He hesitated, because he did not know the exact word to say.

"Thank you," she cried, impulsively; "thank you so much! I am glad there was no real danger, but it is good to think——"

"Miss Granville, I cannot listen to another word—let us change the subject. Besides, you said that you had to meet Mrs. Tredinnick at St. James's Hall. It is a great joy to be with you, but I cannot allow you to be late."

He walked by her side back to Piccadilly silent and moody, and Helen, fancying him to be troubled, did not speak. When they came near St. James's Hall, however, and he held out his hand to say good-bye, she referred to the matter of the Creekavose mortgage again.

"I shall not forget your kindness, Mr. Rosevear. No, I must speak. I did not expect such a thing. Of course, my father will want to possess deeds of the estate again, and so I shall take steps to——"

"Don't, Miss Granville," said Merlin, eagerly. "You will pain me if you do. I have acted dishonourably, I know, and I've been mad, worse than mad. Oh, I've suffered, terribly suffered. You cannot think. Let me have the pleasure of knowing that—that for a time, at least, things will remain as they are."

He was evidently anxious and sincere; not in the way that Helen thought, but for many reasons he did not wish steps to be taken which must reveal the name of their benefactor. He had allowed her to be deceived, and the deception had, he was sure, softened Helen's feelings towards him and raised him in her estimation. His face was drawn and haggard, and as Helen watched him she pitied him.

"Do you really wish this, Mr. Rosevear?"

"I do, oh, so much. Show your forgiveness by granting me this favour."

Her eyes revealed the fact that some of his old power over her remained. After all, the past could never be blotted out.

"Very well, it shall be as you say, at least for a time," she said, quietly. "Good afternoon."

He walked away feeling he had done a good afternoon's work. He was sure that Helen regarded him kindly in spite of the past. He hurried down through Leicester Square and on towards Charing Cross. Sometimes he was jubilant, and his eyes flashed with hope; at others he cursed his folly, and told himself that he had destroyed every prospect of happiness. But all the time his mind was full of plans for accomplishing the desires of his heart.

"After all, she never thought as well of me as she does now," he concluded, as he passed by Toole's Theatre and made his way towards the Strand, "never since I acted like a fool and gave her up. Yes, if Kitty were out of the way I could go up to her boldly and win her again. Well, I must keep up the delusion. Gregory will not tell her; he's not the sort of fellow, and so she will regard me as her benefactor. I'll have another talk with Gregory, so as to make assurance doubly sure. I'm in a delicate place. I love her like my life—and, oh, what a fool I've been! She makes me ashamed of deceit, and yet I'd try and deceive the devil himself in order to get a smile from her!"

During the next fortnight Merlin saw Helen three times, in the company of friends, and on each occasion his conversation was very subdued. He did not tell in so many words that life to him was hopeless, and that his marriage was a misery, but he gave her the impression nevertheless, with the result that Helen was more kind towards him than she would otherwise have been. She allowed herself

to be agreeable to him ; she spoke hopefully of the future, as she had done in the old days when he was a clerk at Besowsa mine. It was noticed, too, that she seemed to take pleasure in his society, while Vivian Gregory, as he saw her evident interest in him, clenched his fists with rage, for he was afraid lest Helen's old love for Merlin still nestled in her heart.

At last the day was fixed for Helen's return to Cornwall, and when Merlin heard of it he sat for a long time brooding. His mind was torn with doubts. For a time he was beside himself. Mrs. Tredinnick had arranged for a gathering of friends at Russell Square ; this gathering was to be held the evening but one before her departure, and he, Merlin, was invited. He had written accepting the invitation, reproaching himself for his weakness, and for entertaining false hopes as he did so. And yet he had no power to refuse. His wife did not get better. Hope seemed to depart from her life, and while she did not complain to him, she felt his absence from her side keenly.

"You will not be late to-night?" she said to him, as he prepared to go to Mrs. Tredinnick's.

"I expect not. Anyhow, I shall be home by twelve," was his reply.

" Mrs. Tredinnick seems to favour you again," she said, presently.

He laughed, and said that the lady in question was an eccentric old soul. No one knew how to please her.

" Still, of course, you are anxious to go on account of Miss Granville?"

"Yes," he said, shortly.

"If she has any spirit she will, of course, refuse to speak to you," she suggested, and there was a bitter tone in her voice. She did not know of their meetings.

" Miss Granville is not a child," was his reply

"Don't you wish I was dead and out of the way, Merlin?" she asked, presently.

"What's the use of talking foolishness?"

"I know I'm a burden to you. I know that but for me you would ask her to marry you."

"Ah, well, but you are living."

"Yes, and I'm your wife. You remember that, I hope."

"Yes, I remember it. I cannot forget it."

"Merlin, beware, I tell you. I'm not a woman to be trifled with. Life is a pain, a bitterness to me, but I'm not to be trifled with—remember that!"

"Don't be a fool, Kitty. I want no Adelphi melodrama scenes. I am married, bound for life according to the virtuous laws of this enlightened country. And Miss Granville—well, she does not believe in the teaching of 'Adam and Eve' or 'Hymen.'"

She had been reclining on a low chair, but she seemed to realise a new strength as he uttered these words. She sprang to her feet and confronted him.

"You call yourself a man, I suppose. You are my husband, and you can speak like that. You know I've regretted, bitterly regretted, writing those books. You know, too, that I hate our heartless, hopeless, faithless, artificial life. You know how I have longed for something more pure, more real, and yet you can speak like that!"

"Yes," he replied, "it is natural you want to forget your past. So do I; but we can't—curse it, we can't! We've both been fools!"

"Merlin," she said in a husky voice, "you, my husband, love this Helen Granville!"

"Well, and what if I do?" he said bitterly. "Is it any wonder?" He was stung to madness by her words, and scarcely knew what he was saying.

"Ah, you confess it!" Her face was livid and drawn as

if by pain. "You want me to die—I know. Well, I will not; I'll live to spite you. For a long time now I've had nothing to live for, but I have now. I've you to spite. There, go!"

He left the house, and hailed a passing hansom. "She's enough to drive a fellow to the devil," he muttered, as the cab rolled noiselessly along the street. "But there, I've got out of hell; I'll be in heaven for the next few hours! Oh, what a mad fool I've been!"

There were only a few people at Mrs. Tredinnick's. There was no crush, no noise. It was a quietly pleasant gathering.

"Ah, Gregory," said Merlin after he had exchanged courtesies with his hostess. "It's quite like old times for you and me to meet so often. How is the world serving you?"

"Fine," replied Gregory.

"Why, have you made a hit?"

"No, I've made no hit; but it is pleasant to meet with people one likes." The truth was he had had five minutes' conversation with Helen, and she had been more than ordinarily kind to him. He looked towards her as he spoke, and his eyes flashed with joy. Merlin felt a pang of jealousy. Would Gregory win her after all? She had refused him once, but might she not, realising what a fine fellow he was, soften towards him? It should not be; he would move heaven and earth to hinder it.

He moved across the room and came to Helen. He held out his hand eagerly, and in his eyes was a look of sadness and longing.

"You seem very gay to-night, Miss Granville," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Rosevear," was her reply.

"Yes, well, to you life is full of hope; you have a future."

"Well, and you?"

"I have no hope, no future."

"You speak like one who's life is over."

"Well, it is—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless the impossible takes place."

"Nothing should be impossible to a brave man," she said. "Since I have come to London, I have been more and more impressed with the fact that the people are always ready to pay homage to strength, to authority. You have great power; you know it. Use that power aright, and nothing, humanly speaking, should be impossible to you."

"You do not know, you do not understand my position. I have raised the insurmountable barriers with my own hands; I have forged the chains which bind me, with my own hands; I myself have destroyed the wedding garment which should admit me into the feast of joy."

"No, I cannot understand," she replied; "I cannot see the meaning of your figures."

"I should like to tell you, if I may," he cried; but before he could say more Helen's society was claimed by others.

The evening passed quickly away, too quickly for Merlin. But he did not get an opportunity of continuing the conversation he had begun. Moreover, he had an idea that Helen avoided him, and his heart became bitter and heavy at the thought. He saw, too, that Gregory talked much with her, and that she seemed very happy in his society.

"If I strike I must strike soon," he mused; "if I make a bold venture it must be made at once. And I will make the venture, I will!"

"You seem to have been in favour to-night," said Merlin to Gregory, shortly before their departure.

"Do you think so?" asked Gregory, with a laugh.



"I do indeed. You have got out of the Slough of Despond in which you resided when I called at your diggings some weeks ago."

"Yes, I think I have. I hope I have."

"I suppose you don't intend accompanying Miss Granville to Cornwall on Thursday?"

"No. But the time *may* come, Rosevear. I have little grounds for hope; but I do not despair."

"Why, has she encouraged you? Excuse me for asking; we are old friends, you know."

"I don't know. Not as some would call encouragement; but when one has been living for years on nothing—well, then a little becomes a feast," and Gregory laughed joyfully.

"Have you renewed your request, then?"

"Oh, no; still——"

He did not finish the sentence, but turned to Mrs. Tredinnick, who stood by his side.

"Yes," mused Merlin, "what I do must be done quickly, and yet dare I? Have I been mistaken, or haven't I?"

He went up to Helen boldly, and the man to whom she had been talking turned away at his approach.

"I should like a few minutes' private conversation with you before you return to Cornwall," he said, nervously.

"I'm afraid it is impossible," she said, looking around the room.

"Yes, to-night I know it is impossible, but you do not leave until Thursday. To-morrow—could I not see you for a little while to-morrow? It means more to me than you can think."

"We are comparatively alone," she said, a little nervously. "Perhaps you can tell me now what you wish to say."

"No, I could not. I cannot talk amidst this Babel of tongues. A time like this is fit only to discuss what is of no importance. I know I have no right to claim any favour at your hands; I deserve being banished from your presence. It is only of your goodness and forbearance that you speak to me at all. But for the sake of old times—times which can never be recalled—could you not grant me half-an-hour's interview to-morrow?"

He spoke pleadingly, and his voice was trembling. She hesitated a second; then she said, as if with an effort, "Yes, I shall be alone to-morrow for an hour between three and four."

"Thank you, very much. I will be here then. Good-night."

He left her side hurriedly, and a few minutes' later stood in the square alone.

"That you, Rosevear?"

"Yes; why, it's Gregory. Are you walking back?"

"I don't mind. I could not sleep if I went to my rooms. I'll walk with you if you like; then if I feel like it I can take a cab from your house."

"That's right. It's rather cold; let's be moving sharp."

The two men left the square and walked westward.

"What are you doing, Rosevear?" asked Gregory, presently.

"Doing! What do you mean?"

"I mean work. Have you anything on hand?"

"Yes, a dozen things; and yet I can't do anything."

"That's funny, isn't it?"

"No. You know what you said to me years ago, Gregory? You said that the novelist's real power lay in the quality called soul. Well, I've lost my soul."

"Nonsense."



"But I have for the time. It'll come back to me again, I think, but for the present I've lost it. I've felt it going for years."

"How?"

"Well, I've seen my cursed folly. You told me that I was the Man with the Muck Rake, and I laughed at you for being a preacher. But you spoke the truth. I've raked the straws and the sticks of the dust-heap of life together, and I've missed the crown of life!"

He spoke wildly, recklessly. He was much excited, or he would not have spoken in this way.

"Look you, Gregory," he went on, "I felt my power going before I wrote 'The Failure of David's Son'; indeed, that book was planned and written in pure desperation. Some of the best critics had been saying that I had lost my power, and I swore to let them know I hadn't. Quill told me that the sale of my books was falling off, and that the inquiries about them were less numerous. As you know, success has been the breath of my life, and I said that if I never wrote another book I'd show them what was what. So I threw all scruples aside, and wrote that thing. Well, it sold by thousands as you know; but I knew it hadn't the breath of life. I've lost the power to give life to any book. My brain is as clear as ever, but nothing within me responds to the invention of my brain; and thus I'm always cursing myself because I can't write."

"Oh, but it'll come back."

"No, if I believed in religion I should say that I had somehow committed the unpardonable sin."

"Nonsense. Why the very fact that you can talk in this way shows that you are capable of winning back more than you have ever lost."

"Do you think so, really think so, Gregory?"

"I do indeed."

"And you think I might yet do real good in the world? I'm only a young fellow yet, you know."

"Young fellow! Why, you haven't reached your prime yet. Of course, you'll do some grand work in the world yet."

"And you would regard it as my duty to seek to win back my old enthusiasms, my old hopes."

"I do, indeed. If you could do that, you would do great work—great work."

"And if, in order to get back that power, I had to do what was unconventional, outrageous, what then?"

He spoke pleadingly, as though he wished Gregory to give him an excuse for doing what he wanted to do.

"It depends on what you mean by unconventional, outrageous. No man can do real, true work unless he himself is real and true."

"And it is the duty of every man to seek the means whereby he is sure he can become real and true. Don't you think so?"

"Certainly," said Gregory; "only like begets like. No man can become a true man by using untrue means."

"Of course not; and those means which ennoble one must be right, mustn't they?"

"Yes, there can be no doubt about that, I think."

"I could not bear to lose my power," continued Merlin, after a pause. "It cannot be right that I should. There's Bentley. He wrote two books that were works of genius; since then he has published nothing but drivel — pure drivel."

"But he prostituted his genius."

"Yes, and he has continued doing so."

"There can be no doubt about that. He was always seeking for sensations, always willing to sacrifice anything in order to get on."

"Just so."

They walked on in silence for a time; then Merlin burst forth. "You'll not see Miss Granville before she returns to Cornwall, I suppose?"

"Yes; I'm going to Paddington on Thursday morning."

"Are you?" He paused a second. "Any man would be helped to be his best, nay, he couldn't help being the best he was capable of being, with such a woman by his side," he added.

"That's true," said Gregory, fervently.

"Good-night, old man. Here we are; there's a hansom just passing. You will be at your rooms in a few minutes."

Gregory entered the hansom, while Merlin let himself into his house, and then found his way to his study.

"It's not only feasible, it's my duty," he said at length, "my duty; I shall never do good work again else. That's settled; I'll go to bed."

He went to his room; the lights were low, but he saw his wife's face plainly. It was very pale, very haggard; she looked years older than she really was. She moaned in her sleep as if in pain.

"No, I can't stay here, I can't," he whispered with a shudder, "I can't sleep either. I'll go to my study again and try to work. I can always work best in the stillness of the night." He cut some slips of ruled paper and placed them on his writing desk, and tried to compose his thoughts, but he was unable. He tried again and again, but in vain.

"It's no use," he said, hoarsely, "no use. I'm mad, I think. I'll have a read instead. What shall it be?"

He ran his eyes along the shelves until he saw "Morning." He caught at it eagerly, and began at the beginning.

An hour later he was more calm; the book had inspired him with hope. "It's a good omen," he said, "a good omen; her book has made me more happy, more hopeful

already. I can't sleep up yonder, but I'll lie down on the sofa here."

The following morning he awoke refreshed and cheerful.

"Yes, it's all right, all right," he said; "everything points that way, everything tells me it is right!"

At half-past two he left his house, and wended his way towards Russell Square. His heart was beating painfully, but he did not hesitate; he had many fears, but he would not yield to his misgivings. At three o'clock he rang the bell of Mrs. Tredinnick's house.

"In a few minutes I shall know," he said.



CHAPTER XXXII

BECOMING A CHILD AGAIN

HELEN was sitting alone waiting for Merlin. She had wondered often why he wished to speak to her; she could not imagine why he should so earnestly desire a private interview. His eagerness interested her and aroused her curiosity. Moreover, there was, in spite of everything, something fascinating in the thought of a private conversation with an old love. She saw that he was unhappy, and she pitied him. Had he been joyous, she would have refused his request; but it is easy to forgive a fallen enemy, aye, and be kind to him.

She saw him come up the Square, and, if the truth must be confessed, her heart beat faster than was its wont. When he entered the room she received him courteously. She saw at once that it was no light matter that drew him to Russell Square. He had the look of a desperate man, and paid no heed to the usual inquiries which are asked between acquaintances.

"I came to speak to you to-day, Miss Granville," he said, "because my life is an endless misery, because day by day I live in hell."

She was somewhat frightened at the tone of his voice, and did not reply.

"Yes, I know I seem to talk wildly. I speak the truth, nevertheless. I am a thousand times more hopeless than

when, years ago, I was poor and unknown and wanted to push myself into fame. Then you came like an angel from heaven to my side; you caused the sun to shine upon my path, you gave me strength and courage. Now there is nothing bright before me. My power for work seems to be gone. I am in despair."

"But why, Mr. Rosevear?"

"Why? You surely know—you must know. What light comes into my life now? I live in perpetual darkness."

"I am sorry that your power for work seems to be gone, but it will, perhaps, come back. Most people, I suppose, have their times of depression. In a little while you will be able to laugh at your foolish fears."

"There is only one thing that can bring light back to my life," he cried; "only one thing, and I despair of getting it. Did I say I was in perpetual darkness? That is wrong. I have one bright spot in my sky; there is one ray of hope that comes to me. If I were sure that this one hope could be realised, I would laugh at darkness, I would cast my fears to the winds—I—I could do anything. But I am afraid—afraid. It seems too daring, too impossible."

He appeared to be talking to himself rather than to Helen, and she saw that he was suffering. She could not help pitying him, he was so dejected, so utterly in despair.

"Believe me, I feel for you, Mr. Rosevear," she said. "I know your home life must be sad just now; but your wife may soon get better. Let us hope that she will. Then——"

"Don't mention my wife!" he cried bitterly. "I loathe the thought of her, I shudder at the mention of her name. She is my burden, my darkness, my curse. But for her I might perchance be happy; but she stands in my path, she ——I could curse, nay, I do curse the day I ever saw her."

She was almost frightened at the intense passion of his

speech; she scarcely knew what to say, for as yet she knew not what was in his heart.

"Perhaps the darkness may pass away. If there is a misunderstanding between you and Mrs. Rosevear, some little thing can dispel it."

"It can never be dispelled—never!"

"But why?"

"Why? Because—because—surely you must know it—because I still love you—love you with a thousand times more fervour and strength than in the old days; because my love for you has never died out—it has only slumbered; because I was mad—mad to act as I have acted. I never loved the woman who bears my name. I married her because I wanted position, name, wealth, and I thought she could help me to obtain them. I thought my love for you was only a boyish passion which would die away, and so I acted insanely. I have never been happy with her. I have always wearied of her society. But when I saw you after these years, I would have given my hands, my eyesight, to win your love again! Do you understand? The slumbering love was aroused, and now it has mastered me. You are everything to me—everything! You understand why I am in despair now. I am bound by the laws of my country to a woman that I now loathe, a woman with a dreary past, a woman that arouses the poorest, the basest parts of my nature, and all the time my heart is torn with love for you! Now do you understand?"

He poured forth his confession passionately; his words came forth like a torrent. For a moment Helen was stunned; she could not collect her thoughts, she was too startled to speak.

"Do you wonder that I hate my wife now?" he went on. "Do you wonder that her death would be a release to me? Can't you see that you——"

"Stop, Mr. Rosevear," said Helen; "I can listen no further. This is an insult to your wife—to me. Besides, I have no right to hear about your feelings towards your wife; I have no right to listen to such words as you have spoken."

"But you have a right—you must listen to me."

"I forbid you to speak further."

"But I must speak further, and you must listen. I have only told a part of my story yet."

"You must not. I have nothing whatever to do with your life."

"But you have—you have everything to do with it."

"Will you leave the house, or must I call a servant?"

"No, no, you love me still. You do, you *do!* We cannot forget the past; you love me, and love overrides everything."

"How dare you?" cried Helen, pale to the lips.

"I dare everything now. My wife is dying, I shall soon be free. My whole future depends on you—you. If you turn away from me my life will be a hopeless wreck, with you to inspire me I can do great work. I can; and you love me. Confess it plainly, and say you will wait for me until I am free."

"Merlin Rosevear!" cried Helen. "Yes, *I* will speak now. If I loved you as you think I do, such conduct as yours would make me scorn you, despise you. You love me!—you! What *is* your love? Long years since I sacrificed much for you. I loved you then and believed in you; but you, sordid and base as you were on your own confession—you discarded me. Well, I forgave you that. When I saw you dejected, miserable, I was sorry for you; I tried to show you that I bore no ill-will because of the past. When I discovered that you befriended us at a time you thought us in danger of poverty, I thought still more kindly



of you; but now you destroy my respect. You, while your wife, who you tell me is slowly dying—you come here and tell me that you love me. You plead illicit love for me! I cannot forgive myself for having listened to your words."

"But, Helen, listen; I am not so mean as you think, and it is my love that makes me speak. It is my despair at the thought of losing you that goads me on. Give me some hope, for the sake of what I once was, for the sake of what I may become; pity me, be kind to me. My wife, so the doctor says, is slowly dying." He hesitated as if ashamed to utter the words on his lips, but he was beside himself. "I shall be free soon," he murmured. "Will you not wait a little while, Helen? I can be a true man with you by my side."

For a moment she felt like answering him with angry, scornful words. She felt ashamed, humiliated. His words had been an insult, although she did not doubt his love for her. She knew nothing about the loose notions concerning marriage held by certain phases of London life; she did not know how common were such scenes as that through which she had just passed. According to her conception of life, the man who could speak as he had spoken must have become base; and yet she pitied him as he stood before her, with a look of sullen despair in his eyes.

"Merlin Rosevear," she said, quietly, "you must be mad; did I not think so, I would call a servant and have you thrown out of the house. I will try hard to forgive you; it is very difficult, but I will try hard. As for respect —but I wish to be alone."

She rang a bell as she spoke, and then left the room, while he stood humiliated, and yet lashed to fury by her words.

"I've tried to pluck the apple before it was ripe," he said,

bitterly, as he left the house. "I believe she does care for me, but I did not count sufficiently on her old-world ideas. And yet why should it be wrong to speak as I have spoken? Where does the wrong come? Her pride is touched, I suppose, when I suggest that she should wait for a dying woman's shoes! Why was I so impatient? Why did I not wait?"

A hundred times during his walk back did he bemoan his folly. Again and again did he curse himself for being so impatient and precipitate.

"I only wanted a little hope," he cried; "I only wanted to know that when my days of bondage with Kitty were over I should find her waiting. I sought her happiness as well as my own. And now—everything is lost."

Presently another mood came upon him.

"It was something like a scene in an Adelphi drama," he laughed, with a sneer. "I was the scheming villain, and she was the virtuous heroine, and, of course, the heroine won the day. Still, if I remember aright, in an orthodox melodrama the villain goes on scheming; he tries one plot after another, each more difficult than the last. Well, I'm not an Adelphi villain quite. No; I'll wait events. She'll see, on quiet consideration, that in reality my love is true and honourable. God knows—if there is a God—that I never dreamed even of disturbing conventional morality. Sons make schemes in view of their aged father's death; I was only trying to mature a plan in view of the death of my wife, who can't live long. Still, one doesn't know; she may live for years yet—years. Perhaps I did right, after all. She'll see, when she gets back to Cornwall, that I love her still."

And so he went on musing, trying to excuse himself, yet all the time reproaching himself.

When he reached his house he found that his wife was



better. The doctor had visited her while he had been away, and had pronounced her much improved. He advised plenty of amusements and pleasant society.

"But for her," thought Merlin, "I might be happy now, and instead of being regarded as a sort of scoundrel, I should be her accepted lover. I wonder if all *is* lost!"

A little later he went into the room where his wife sat. It was one of her good days, and she gave him a smile as he came near to where she was and sat down. For some time neither spoke, but Merlin watched her closely. She looked forty-five at least, and her face was yellow and faded. Around her eyes were dark rings, and her mouth was drawn down at the corners. She had seemed to grow many years older since their return from Cornwall.

And she stood between him and Helen. It is true she was very wealthy, and because she was his wife he had become a rich man, but it brought him no joy now. After all, many of the luxuries which money bought were unnecessary; life was no happier because of them. In a few years he had become satiated by these things; how gladly he would give them all up to have Helen by his side! Besides, he was not poor. He could earn large sums with his pen; the royalties on his books and plays brought him far more than he needed. And Helen would be well supplied with money, too. She could command large sums for her work, while it had become known to him that she would inherit Mrs. Tredinnick's property. Oh what a fool, a blind fool, he had been!

These thoughts made him feel very bitter towards his wife, for she was the hindrance to his happiness; she made his dreams impossible. And so he sat looking often at her, and occasionally at the articles scattered around the room, and all the while a bitter pain was gnawing at his heart.

"You are a cheerful companion, Merlin," said his wife.

"I can return the compliment."

"I would be cheerful if I could, but a blight seems to have fallen on me."

"Yes, on me, too."

"Why, what blight falls on you?"

"Your abominable jealousy, for one thing."

"Have I no reason to be jealous? You scarcely ever come near me, and when we are together for a few minutes you seem to regard me as a sort of fever corpse."

"Still whining, still complaining."

"Merlin, I want to be cheerful; I want to be happy. Help me, will you? Why should I be old and miserable? I am but a young woman in years. Let us try and make life better, Merlin; let us begin afresh."

"How can one begin afresh with you?" he replied, brutally. "We have nothing in common. Since you have started on your tomfoolery you have been a constant irritation to me."

"I suppose you are constantly contrasting me with Miss Granville, your old sweetheart?"

"Well, what then? You don't pretend to compare favourably with her, I hope." He started up and walked to and fro in the room, with an angry look on his face.

"And I am in the way now, I suppose!" she cried. His words had aroused the spirit of jealousy within her. "Oh, I know; I've heard only to-day that you've been dancing attendance on her lately. I should have thought that you would be ashamed to be constantly creeping after a girl you once discarded, while she, if she had a spark of pride or proper feeling—aye, had she the poorest modicum of self-respect—she would treat you as one beneath her notice. But I know, you've fallen in love with her again. Tell the truth, now, haven't you?"

"Well, what if I have? Is it any wonder?" He was scarcely master of his tongue as he spoke, and her words maddened him more than ever.

"It so happens you have a wife."

"Yes, I have a wife," he cried, bitterly; "I have a wife with a vengeance, and she lets me know it. And a beautiful wife she is, too; she wrote 'Hymen,' and now she wants to be young, *young!*" and he laughed, sneeringly.

"And you hate me, I suppose, because I stand in your way?"

"You can't hate some things," he said; "you only have a feeling of contempt."

"Well," she said, wearily, "I shall be dead soon."

"No such luck," he answered, cruelly, bitterly. He hated himself for uttering the words, but the sting of Helen's words rankled in his heart, while his wife's reproaches goaded him to madness.

She watched him closely; then she said, "I suppose you've just come from her? I suppose you've made love to her, and she refuses because I stand in the way?"

It was a bow drawn at a venture, but it struck home. A guilty flush mantled his face, his eyes gleamed with passion. His wife saw that her words had an effect, and she was led to believe in the truth of what she had spoken.

"Have you told her you love her?" she said, hoarsely.

"I refuse to tell you."

"But you shall tell me. Merlin Rosevear," and an unnatural strength seemed to come to her, "Merlin Rosevear, do you love this girl, and have you told her so?"

"Yes, I have," he cried, losing all control over himself.

"And she?"

"She! Why you are in the way with your yellow face and jealous temper. And so I am cursed, ruined for life because of you."

She sat back in a chair like one stunned. Her eyes seemed to be fixed on some far-off object, and her face was as still as that of a statue.

"I am sorry I spoke like that, Kitty," he said, "very sorry. I will leave you and send Mrs. Gray to you."

She did not speak, but kept looking in the same stony way.

"I can't stay here," said Merlin, as he entered his study; "no, I can't stay here. I'll go to my club; I'll tell a servant that I am going to be there till late. I shall be sure to meet a lot of fellows. I never got drunk in my life; I think I'll try it to-night. I must do something to forget my misery."

He went back to the room where his wife was. Mrs. Gray, the companion which the doctor had recommended, was with her; but she sat in the same posture, she still seemed to look at some far-off object with the same stony stare.

"I am going to dine at my club, Kitty," he said. "You know which—the Boomerang. I sha'n't be back before midnight, unless you especially wish me."

His words seemed to arouse her. "What time do you say you'll be back?" she asked.

"Not before midnight, unless you wish me."

"Oh, no. What time is it now?"

"Five o'clock."

"Seven hours; that'll do. Merlin, will you kiss me before you go?"

He came to her side and kissed her, at the same time wondering at her request.

"Forgive me, Kitty," he said, "I've been a brute."

"But was it true?"

He did not answer her question, but repeated his former words. "I was a brute, Kitty; forgive me, will you?"



"Good night, Merlin; don't hurry back. I have some writing to do, but I shall be asleep before you get home. Kiss me again."

He kissed her again and walked away, while Mrs. Gray, who stood out of earshot, smiled as she thought what a loving couple they were.

"This has been a day," thought Merlin, as he got into a hansom, "and I've got the worst of it all along the line. My word! I've come to a pretty pass. I couldn't have done what I've done to-day if I were the same sort of fellow I was seven years ago. But there, it's no use. If I'd not married Kitty and Helen would still have me, I should be a new man, I think; but there, the whole riddle of life is a curious business."

Meanwhile Merlin's wife seemed to be possessed of a strange, calm strength. She went into her husband's study and took from his writing-desk some loose slips of paper.

"I'm going to try and write, Mrs. Gray," she said, quietly; "it is a long time since I tried my hand at a story. I feel like writing one to-night."

Mrs. Gray left her, and she commenced to write. Her pen moved rapidly over the paper, and in an hour she had covered several pages of manuscript paper. She read through what she had written, then sat quietly, looking steadily into the fire.

"No, that will scarcely do," she said, at length; "what is the use of a parable? I had better say plainly what I mean."

Again she sat for a long time thinking. Her thoughts did not seem to be sad. Ofttimes a smile would come to her lips and a look of hope into her eyes.

"It will be beautiful to be young," she mused, "beautiful to feel as the children feel. It will be strange to me, who can never remember what it was to be young. First

there were years of toiling over books, during which time my literary and scientific governess nipped all the buds of faith and hope which sprung up in my life. Then there were the years when I was taught the gospel of getting on. Following that was that dreary time when it was my duty to obtain Mr. Telford's money, and then——"

Again she tried to write, but she quickly ceased.

"I was very near to faith while down in Cornwall," she continued. "That dear, simple old woman seemed to make it so easy; it was so real to her. Oh, if I were only reared down there, away from the fetid atmosphere which I breathed! But my time is to come. Yes, it will surely come."

Presently she took some more paper, and began to write again. This time she commenced in the form of a letter:

"My dear Merlin."

After this she wrote several pages, and presently concluded with the words:

"I am, your wife who married you in love and hope,
"KITTY ROSEVEAR."

This she placed in an envelope, addressing it to her husband. Again she sat for some time looking into the fire.

"I see green fields, running brooks, meadow paths, and flowers," she murmured, with a smile; "I can hear the birds singing, too. Yes, it is a land of song," and she commenced humming a childish air.

The look in her eyes became more and more strange, while each minute they burned with a brighter light.

"It will be beautiful, beautiful," she laughed; "Merlin never knew of my little child who died. It is the only pleasant memory of my marriage with the man of gold. I



am glad she died now—died a few hours after her birth; I shall see her again. We shall pick the daisies and the buttercups. The dew will be upon them, and the birds will sing to us as we go together. She'll be a big girl by this time; but she'll be young and pure, and so shall I—so shall I! Just a pure, simple, beautiful life of youth—that is all I want, and I shall have it. Yes, I shall not be deprived of my youth! I'm coming to you, my darling, coming!

"Let me see, what is that prayer?

'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee.
Fain I would to Thee be brought,
Gracious Lord forbid it not.
In the kingdom of Thy grace
Find this little child a place.'

Yes, I remember it. My little cousin used to say it; but my nurse told me it was foolishness, but it isn't. It drives away all those dark shadows that used to enshroud my life. Oh, I've been old so long, so long; it is beautiful to be young again."

She rang the bell, and Mrs. Gray came.

"Will you let me have my medicine, Mrs. Gray? I'm going to bed."

"Will you not have some supper, madam?"

"No, only my medicine."

"Shall I put the sleeping drops in, madam?"

"No, I do not think I shall need them; if I do, I can put them in myself."

"You'll be very careful if you do, madam?"

"Yes, very careful."

Mrs. Gray brought her medicine.

"Take it to my bedroom, Mrs. Gray. I am very tired; I shall not need you any more to-night."

"Not at all, madam?"

"No, not at all. Good-night, Mrs. Gray."

She went quietly into her bedroom. Her medicine was on a cabinet in a corner of the room. She went to the cabinet and stayed there a few minutes. Then she drank the medicine.

"Now I'll go to bed," she murmured. "I'm very tired, but I'll say my prayers first. It's a long, weary, weary time since I said my prayers, but I feel like a child again to-night. Yes, I must say my prayers."

She knelt by the bed, and the tears trickled slowly down her cheeks.

"I've forgotten it," she sobbed, "forgotten my prayers. No, I remember the words now:

'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child.'"

* * * * *

At midnight, when Merlin Rosevear sat in the smoking-room of the Boomerang Club, a waiter came to him.

"You are wanted, sir."

"Wanted? Who wants me?"

"A man, sir. He comes from your house. He's in the hall, sir."

Merlin followed the waiter to the hall. "Well, George," he said to the man, "what is it?"

"You are wanted home immediate, sir."

"Why?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell, sir; but it's very important."

Merlin's heart became cold; a great dread entered his life. "Hail a cab at once, waiter," he cried.

Before Merlin had put on his overcoat, a cab was at the door of the club-house.



"Drive like mad," he said to the cabman, mentioning his address.

A few minutes later he entered his own house.

"I was told to tell you to go straight to Mrs. Rosevear's bedroom, sir," said the servant.

He rushed up the stairway, and a minute later entered the room. He saw two or three people standing close by a still form that was kneeling by the bed. He went straight to the bedside, feeling as though a cold hand were placed on his heart.

"Is my wife ill?" he asked. "Kitty, Kitty, won't you speak to me?"

"Mrs. Rosevear is dead." It was the doctor who spoke.

Merlin's eyes became riveted on the immovable figure kneeling by the bed as if in the attitude of prayer.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

TWO hours after Merlin Rosevear returned from club to find his wife dead, he sat in his study w the doctor.

"This is terribly sudden, doctor," he said.

"It is sudden, Mr. Rosevear. I told you what might expect, however."

"But you do not think there was—that is—you do imagine she died—as—as her mother died?"

"I should not like to say positively, but there are dences."

"But what evidences? Kitty has had a diseased he ever since I knew her. She never dared to lie on her side."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, what makes you say—what you have said?"

"I have examined the medicine she took; there is a lit left in the bottom of the glass. It contained a large amou of——" the last word the doctor whispered in Merlin's e

Merlin shuddered. He thought of what had pass between them before they separated, and the memory stu him like the fang of a viper.

"But you have nothing to reproach yourself with," w on the doctor. "Mrs. Gray has told me of your parti

and how affectionate you were. You could not help her having a tendency towards suicide."

"No, no; I could not help that; but, doctor, you have visited her daily—you know her history. Surely there need be no inquest. You can fill up the necessary certificate?"

"Yes," said the doctor, slowly; "I think I can do that. For the sake of the family I think I can do that. There is no need, as far as I can see, to have an inquest."

He seemed to be debating with himself, as if he were not sure about his duty.

A servant came to the door.

"Mr. Winthrop, please, sir," she said.

Another fear entered Merlin's heart. Had his wife ever told her father concerning their strained relations? His hand trembled as he held it out to his father-in-law. Mr. Winthrop, however, evidently knew nothing; he spoke kindly to Merlin about their common loss.

"Doctor," said Mr. Winthrop, presently, "you don't think Kitty's death resembles that of her mother?"

"It is hard to say. I'm afraid it does."

Mr. Winthrop was silent a few minutes, and then he repeated Merlin's words about an inquest. When he was assured that it would not be necessary he began to speak freely. "I have feared it for years," he said; "she has threatened to end her life dozens of times. After she knew Merlin she seemed to be happier and more hopeful, but I am afraid there was a taint of insanity in her nature. By the way, Merlin, did she leave no message to you?"

"She told Mrs. Gray she was going to write a story," replied the doctor before Merlin could speak. "I have read what she wrote, but I can see no meaning in it."

"Was that all?"

"No," said Merlin, "it was not all; she left me a letter."

"I did not see it," said the doctor.

"No; I read it while you were upstairs just now. You can see it if you like."

Mr. Winthrop seized the letter and read it eagerly.

"My Dear Merlin,—The darkness is nearly over. I shall live in the sunlight soon. I have always wanted happiness, and it has never come to me; it is near me now. I can see the sun rising behind the hills; I can see the dewdrops glistening; I can see the lambs playing in the meadows, and I can hear the birds singing. You know that I have been robbed of my childhood; I've never known what it is to be young—until now. I hate the world—I mean the world of London. It is so old. The children have no childhood; they are taught to be artificial, and to lie from the beginning. At least, I was—you know, Merlin. You could never be happy with me. How could you? I could not be young. In spite of everything I was old, so very, very old. I don't think I have ever really loved you. How could I? Yes, I did, though; but it was not with the heart of a girl, and you, of course—you never loved me. I have known for weeks that the end was coming, my heart was so strange; but I never thought I should be as happy as I am now. My childhood is coming back to me; all the hateful, hollow, artificial life is past, and I am going to be a child again; and I shall pick flowers with my little darling who died a few hours after her birth, and I shall sing like children ought to sing. I know the secret of life now; there is nothing worth having but a heart that keeps young for ever, and which always loves. And my heart will be young, and I shall love for ever. That is all, Merlin. You could not help, and I could not help, and there is nothing to forgive on either side. Besides, I have entered into light.

"Tell father this, will you? If he learns my secret he

will find me by-and-by. And so the past—the cold, dark, dreary past—is gone for ever.

"Good-night, Merlin. Will you ever learn my secret? I do not know, and I am afraid; and yet you must remember, always remember, that, I am, your wife who married you in love and hope,

"KITTY ROSEVEAR."

"That letter settles it," said the doctor; "it was not written by a sane woman."

"No," said Mr. Winthrop; "but, thank God, she was happy. Her mother was not so."

"I wonder if there is any truth in what she said?" mused the doctor.

"What do you mean?" asked Merlin.

"About becoming young, about always loving. It is a beautiful dream. It reminds me of the time when I was a boy down at Lynmouth, in Devonshire. Such dreams used to come to me as I wandered by the River Lynn and listened to its murmurings. They are all gone now. Tom Hood was a poet after all—'I remember, I remember the fir trees dark and high——'" The doctor checked himself.

"This affair has unmanned me," he said; "it unsettles my mind, it makes me forget that I am an old doctor on the wrong side of sixty. Well, I must be going."

"Nay, do not go," said Merlin. "Stay till daybreak now, gentlemen. I must not be left alone!"

"Very well," said the old man; "we may as well stay, Winthrop."

The two older men talked about many things, but Merlin was silent. He read again and again the words his wife had written, and wondered if her mind were deranged, or if she told the truth when she said she had entered into light, and

in spite of everything he felt that she was happier than he could ever be.

When morning came the doctor and Mr. Winthrop left the house, and from that time to the day of the funeral Merlin would see no one. Many messages came to him—messages of sympathy and of grief; but he took no heed. His life was very dark, very dark. Again and again he asked himself if he had not driven her to end her life.

There was no reproach in her letter. Nay, it was full of brightness and tenderness. When he had first seen her she was about to end her life. Then her heart was bitter; then her sky was dark. Now she told him that she had become a child again.

All the same, he brooded hour after hour, thinking of his interview with Helen, of the words he had spoken to his wife, of the letter she had written, and of what lay before him.

He wondered if Kitty had made another will since the time she had told him that she had given all her wealth to him. He wondered what the world was saying about him and about his dead wife.

Where was his wife now? Did she really exist? Was she young again, as she had said? Had a child's heart come to her? He thought long about the revelation concerning the child born to her by her first marriage, and which had died just after its birth. It was strange, very strange.

And Helen?—what did she think of him now? Had she heard of his wife's death; and if so, what were her feelings concerning him? Thus the days passed, until the dead body which he had last seen in the attitude of prayer was laid in the cold, dark earth.

The funeral was largely attended, and many people of note followed him to his wife's grave. The coffin was



covered with wreaths sent by men and women of wide renown. Even at that moment he felt proud of the position he had won. Kitty was not the wife of a Cornish miner, but of the well-known man of letters.

Like one dazed he watched while the coffin was placed by the side of the grave, and listened while the minister read the service. It was almost meaningless to him until he heard the words, "We therefore commit her body to the ground . . . in sure and certain hope that those that sleep in Jesus shall rise to everlasting life." What did it mean? Was it a farce or a reality? Was there any truth in the Christian faith? He looked into the grave, and saw the writing on the coffin:

"KITTY ROSEVEAR."

Then followed the year in which she was born, and the year she had died. Underneath these words were written:

"*She is a child again.*"

He could not explain why, but his heart became light at the sight of the words.

The minister pronounced the benediction presently, and he turned and walked to the carriage. He had scarcely reached it when he saw Vivian Gregory. He held out his hand.

"Gregory, old man," he said, "I shall be alone after ten o'clock to-night; I should be glad if you could come and see me."

"Certainly, Merlin. I'll be at your house. God bless you."

At ten o'clock Merlin was alone. All the members of his wife's family had gone; no one was in the house save the servants. He sat in the study waiting for Gregory. He

had not long to wait. Three minutes after the clock had struck ten Gregory entered the room.

They talked a few minutes about matters which did not interest Merlin in the least; then he said suddenly: "Gregory, I haven't seen a paper of any sort; what has been said?"

"The kindest things, old man."

"Nothing but kind things?"

"Nothing. Every one feels for you. Of course it has become known that you spent the evening at the Boomerang Club. One or two journalists were there—as you know."

"Yes, well?"

"Well, they gave a description of the way you received the news that you were wanted home immediately."

"Kindly?"

"Oh, yes, very kindly."

"Then?"

"Well, after you had got in the cab, George, your man, told what had taken place."

"I see; so the news of Kitty's death was in the morning papers?"

"Oh, yes."

"I must look at them. I've been too dazed to read anything. I told the servants that I could see no one, and I had no interest in what was going on. I was thinking about many things—many things."

"Every sympathy is felt for you, old man, and nothing but the kindest expressions have been used."

There was a silence between the two men for a few minutes, then Merlin spoke again.

"Did you see Miss Granville off at Paddington on Thursday morning?"

"Yes; I went to the station early. I bought the paper there which told me of your loss."

"I see. Did Miss Granville know?"

"Not when she came to the station."

"Did you tell her?"

"Yes."

"Did she say anything?"

"Not for some time. Of course, the news gave her a shock. She did not know Mrs. Rosevear, but knowing you as she did, she was much moved."

"But she made no remarks?"

"None at all, until just before the train moved off."

"What did she say then?"

Gregory looked at Merlin keenly, as though a strange thought had entered his mind.

"I scarcely remember her exact words," he replied, "but I know she asked whether I thought you would feel your wife's loss keenly."

"Yes, and what did you say?"

"I said you had been regarded as a loving couple."

"I see. That was all, I suppose?"

"Yes, that was all."

"Are you going to Cornwall soon?"

"No, I think not. I am afraid it is no use at all."

"I thought from your remarks the other night that you had hopes."

"Yes, but they are all gone now. When I face facts fairly I can see that it is useless for me to build on such a foundation as I had been laying. At any rate, I shall not go to Cornwall until next June or July."

"Meanwhile will Miss Granville come to London again?"

"No; she is engaged on a new book, and says that she means to work at it until it is finished. Mrs. Tredinnick is going down in a couple of months, I believe. What do you intend to do with yourself, Rosevear?"

"I—I think I shall leave England for a few months."

"Yes; well, a change may do you good. Where do you think of going?"

"I did think of going home to my mother and father, but I've concluded not to. I think it will be better to leave the country for a bit."

"Yes," said Gregory.

"The truth is I want a change of scene; I want to forget —well, everything. I think I shall go to Egypt, to Cairo— and work."

"A good idea."

"Yes, work is the best medicine for me—that is, if I can manage it. I've not done sixpen'orth for months. I hope I shall be able to when I get to Egypt. I wish you'd come with me."

"I can't, Rosevear; I can't afford it."

"Why? Things have been going well with you, and you have money independent of your profession."

"Yes, but—well, I'm a bit short now."

"A couple of hundred pounds would carry you through easily."

"I've not the money. You know, old man, that I—I paid that mortgage on Creekavose. It's a secret, of course."

"And you've heard nothing about it since?"

"Not a word. All I know is that my cheque has been presented. It was a fairly large amount, and as a consequence I'm not flush with ready money."

"Well, we can easily manage. I'll take over the affair, and let you have your money. I can do it quite easily. We can have a grand time in Egypt—at least, you can; while I —well, I may be able to forget."

Gregory was silent a few minutes, then he said decidedly, "No, Rosevear, no; I can't do that—it's impossible. I should like going to Egypt well enough; but no, I'll work on at home."

"Then let me pay all expenses. I'm well off—I'm a rich man, I suppose. You helped me once; let me have the pleasure of paying this time."

"You are very good, old man, but it cannot be."

"No, you must not put it that way," interrupted Merlin; "you would be really doing me a kindness. I shall be lonely, very lonely. We are both in need of a change, and I should enjoy it ten times more if you were with me."

Gregory mused a few seconds, then he said slowly, "Well, I'll see, Merlin. I've just remembered that I am under a promise to write a short story for Whale and Shark. You know they are issuing what they call the 'Springwater Series of Little Novels.' Whale has offered me £100 for the thing. I've already got it into working order, and I daresay I can finish it in a week. Whale is a good fellow, too. He pays on delivery of MS."

"Well, I'll gladly wait a week," cried Merlin, eagerly. "It's now January; we can be in Cairo in ten days from the time of starting. Do try, old man."

Gregory looked at Merlin and saw the look of anxiety on his face. He looked quite forty, and was pale and haggard. The young man pitied him.

"I'll do my best, Merlin," he said; "besides, I begin to take to the idea. Of course, I can't positively promise, but I'll try."

After Gregory was gone Merlin gave himself up to thinking. For a long time he seemed conscience-stricken and repentant, but presently he became more self-satisfied. He did not see, after all, that he was to be blamed; he had done nothing but what any one would have done in his place—nothing. True, that quarrel was unpleasant, but people always said foolish things when they were angry. Besides, he had asked his wife to forgive him, and he had

kissed her. He wished she had died in another way; but still he should not worry—there was no reason.

Had he done right in speaking to Helen Granville? Well, he was not quite sure; still, he did not regret it. Helen would remember his words; she would muse over them when alone in that old Cornish house; she would think of the old days, and she would remember that he was free. Should he write her? He thought he would. Yes, he must in some way keep up an intimacy with her, and he must somehow get her to promise to be his wife.

"I'm glad I've got Gregory to come with me," he said, aloud. "It will cut several ways. Let me see now. I must get a few paragraphs going. My nerves are shattered and so forth, and so I'm going to Egypt for change and rest. That will appeal to Helen's sympathies. Then I shall be accompanied by Vivian Gregory; that will tell Helen that he prefers being with me to visiting Cornwall. I must try and establish that thought in her mind. It is a good stroke having Gregory with me. I shall know that he is out of harm's way; I shall be able to destroy any fragment of hope that he will ever be able to win Helen, and I shall probably be able to get that mortgage in my hands. That's the one thing that troubles me. If any inquiries are made the truth will leak out. I've a good mind to run down to Cornwall to-morrow. I can see the lawyer, and perhaps I may be able to see Helen. Who knows? What is more natural than that I should go home after my trouble? But I must be careful, very careful."

He went to his desk and scribbled a few notes. One missive, however, he worded very carefully; this he addressed to the editor of the *Boomerang*. It was nearly five in the morning before he got to bed, and then he did not sleep. Still, he lay four hours and rested his body, but his mind, however, would not rest.

By half-past eleven o'clock he was at Paddington Station. Arrived there, he sent a telegram to his father telling him that he intended being home that night, and asking him to meet him. Another he sent to the proprietor of the Railway Hotel, which stood close by the station nearest his home, telling him he should require a brougham to be in readiness when his train was due. Then he bought a first-class ticket, and, showing a porter his luggage, told him to secure, if possible, an empty compartment, and to see that it was well supplied with foot-warmers. After this he bought a novel and some magazines.

"I may as well be comfortable," he said to himself. Then his mind reverted to the time when he first saw Paddington Station. He remembered how he had gone outside the station with his portmanteau in his hand, and how the roar of the traffic had frightened him. He had come to conquer London then—had come to win fame and fortune. He was fearful of the future, and yet his heart beat light. How could it be otherwise when he remembered that Helen Granville had promised to wait for him? Why, her kiss was warm on his lips, her words of hope and love were ringing in his ears. No wonder he looked forward with hope to the future! Long years had passed since then. He had won the position he had coveted, he had become famous; but he had lost Helen—aye, he had discarded her. And now he was going to Cornwall in the hope of winning her back again. Was he richer now than then? Everything had become topsy-turvy, but had he not lost more than he had gained?

Then he thought of himself—thought of what he was when he left Cornwall and the change that had come over him. No, he had not won in the battle of life.

He entered the carriage. The porter was wondrously attentive, porters usually are when they see a silver coin

between a passenger's finger and thumb. He could afford to pay for any luxury now, and yet he was a poorer man to-day than when he came to Paddington on that well-remembered night.

"But if I can only win Helen again," he mused. "Yes, and I will, too—I will! I have done everything I have set my mind on doing, and I'll do this, and then I can be a happy man."

"I thought you wud be tired, Merlin, my deear booy," said his father to him when he got out of the train that night, "so I jist went ovver to Maaster Treloar's and got his hoss and trap. The hoss es ruther flighty, so he've send Bill Best to drive."

"It's too cold for an open conveyance, father," said Merlin. "I telegraphed for a brougham. Ah, here it is."

"But there's no need of two, my deear booy."

"Oh, no; send Best back. I'll pay Treloar."

"Oa, Maaster Treloar wudden think of takin' nothin'. I was thinkin' of givin' Bill Best somethin', ef you wos willin'."

"That's all right; tell him I telegraphed for a covered conveyance. And, here, give this crown piece to Best."

"But tha's a lot, Merlin."

"Never mind, he's driven several miles in the cold. Come and get in with me as soon as you've told him."

"'Tes a terble waaste ov money," mused John Rosevear. "Five shellen gone to Bill Best, and I dearsay he'll have to pay twelve or fifteen shellen for this cloase carriage. He've come down in a fust-class carriage, too. 'Tes awful waaste. It do make anybody think of what I used to zay when I was a booy—

> 'Ef youth ded knaw what age ded crave,
> How many a penny it would saave.'"



Little was said during the ride home. John asked several questions about the death of his wife, but Merlin answered him evasively; and then the father, seeing that his son was not inclined to talk, relapsed into silence.

Arrived at home, Merlin's over-taxed nerves gave way. His mother's nature was different from that of his father. She flung her arms around his neck and called him "her precious booy." He felt her tears on his cheeks as she asked him about Kitty's death, and expressed the hope that she had "died in the Loard." "I ded like Kitty, Merlin, my dear," she sobbed. "She used to call me mother, and tould me she loved me. I believe she was prepared to die, Merlin, although she wasn't, you may say, a perfessin' Christian."

The memory of the night when she died came back to his mind, and he, too, burst into tears, the first he had shed for many a long day.

They sat and talked for many hours, and by-and-by, when Merlin retired, he felt that his wife had expressed a great truth when she had said that to have a child's heart was to possess the greatest joy of life.

"After all there is something beautiful in this simple home life," he thought; "it makes me want to say my prayers again."

He slept long and soundly. The quiet restfulness of the place seemed to bring peace into his life, and it was noon before he came downstairs. After breakfast he went into the village; he discovered that he had forgotten to bring writing-paper with him, and called at a little shop to get some. While Mrs. Crowle was wrapping it up for him, he saw Mr. Granville ride by on horseback.

"I suppose that Mr. Granville still lives at Creekavose?" he said to Mrs. Crowle.

"Aw iss. Miss Helen, as you knaw, have become a author, and have got piles ov money. Crickavawse people do live in fine style now. Mr. Granville ded give John Terloar nearly thirty pound for that 'oss. He's friendly with Squire Newlyn, too; he's goin' to zee the squire now. Crickavawse cook was 'ere laast night, and tould me that he was goin'. Miss Helen wa'ant go; I spec' she's 'ome ritin'."

Mrs. Crowle gave him a great deal of information during the time he was in the shop, and then, as he walked back to his mother's house, he determined upon a plan of action for that afternoon.

Arrived at the little parlour he wrote a hasty note, and then made his way towards Helen's home. He had not been inside the house for many years, and wondered if he would be able to gain an entrance that afternoon. At least he would try. His heart beat rapidly as he rang the door bell, and when the servant appeared gave her the note he had written.

"Will you give this to Miss Granville, and tell her that the writer awaits her answer?" he said.

The servant took the letter to Helen, who was in the library at work, and gave her the message.

Helen's heart gave a great bound as she saw the writing. She broke the seal with a trembling hand, and read the note.

"DEAR MISS GRANVILLE,—I am going to Egypt next week. This is necessary, as I am physically very ill, and I am told that I must have rest and change. Of course you know that my wife is dead. I have come to Cornwall to see you before I go. I felt that I could not leave England without saying what I feel must be said—and asking your forgiveness. Do not refuse me this request. I will not detain you five minutes. Forgive this incoherent scrawl



my mind is unsettled. Pray be kind to me before I bid you a *final good-bye.*—In great sorrow,

"MERLIN ROSEVEAR."

Helen hesitated a minute as if in doubt what to do; then she looked again at the words which were underlined. A "final good-bye" she repeated. "Yes, I will hear what he has to say."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HELEN AND MERLIN.

HELEN GRANVILLE was startled by the look Merlin's face as he entered the room. It was v pale and haggard. She could see that he had suffe greatly.

"Thank you so much for this favour, Miss Granville," said, "I have not deserved it, I know that in your eye must appear very base and despicable."

"I think nothing further need be said," replied Hel "the past is past, let it not be referred to again."

"I cannot help referring to it," he replied, bitterly. am constantly haunted by my madness, my—call it wh you will. I came to Cornwall to see you; I could not he it. I do not ask you to pity me, I—I—well, perhaps I a not worthy of it; but I do ask you to believe this: T mad words I spoke to you a few days ago in London we inspired only by a feeling of love. I *must* say it. I kn there is no hope for me now, so I can gain nothing speaking, save the feeling that I have put myself right your eyes. My love for you, my despair for the futu drove me mad. I lost control over myself, and yet all t time I never ceased to reverence you. I never thought you save as one of the noblest women that ever lived. Y will believe that, won't you?"

Helen was silent.



"I came to Cornwall to tell you that," he cried. "I thought of writing, but words on paper are so poor. I could not rest until I had seen you face to face and told you that; aye, and made you feel it's truth!"

She looked at him. His eyes were eager, his lips were twitching nervously.

"It is very hard to believe," she said; "your wife was, as you told me, dying——" she hesitated a second, and then she continued slowly, and with an effort, "Yes, I believe you—that is——"

"Nay, don't qualify," he pleaded. "You believe me—then you will forgive me? I do not ask that we shall be friends, or acquaintances even—but you will forgive me?"

"Yes," she said, quietly, "I will try."

"Thank you," he said, fervently. "I can go away with a lighter heart, now. I may have a little peace while I am in Egypt. I will not detain you any longer, my presence can only be painful to you. Good-bye."

He held out his hand as he spoke; but Helen looked out of the window towards the common in the distance.

"There is something else before you go, Mr. Rosevear," she said. "I intended going to Truro to-morrow concerning the money you advanced on Creekavose. That must be settled at once."

"Would you mind letting the matter rest until I come back from Egypt?" he cried. "I am really unfit for business, my mind is distracted. There is not the slightest need; besides, let that remain a few months longer as a pledge of your forgiveness. I know I am asking a great deal, but please let the matter rest—at least, for a time!"

"I cannot promise that," she said, "I really cannot."

"But why? There is no obligation on your part; even as a matter of mere business the estate is a security for the money advanced."

"Yes; but as a mere matter of business, to use your own words, I do not care to owe money to any one. It is not pleasant to me."

"Very well," he said, "if you will have it so, I must not gainsay you."

Bitterly as memories of the past came to her, she could not help pitying him in his abject misery.

"It would be a joy, a help to me, to feel that—that you thought of me kindly, to think that you remembered me as a friend."

"I am sure I shall remember what you did when you thought my father in financial difficulty," replied Helen, "and the fact that our benefactor is paid will not make us think less kindly of him."

"Thank you very much. Good-bye."

She opened the door, and a few seconds later watched him as he walked slowly down the drive. Merlin had acted wisely in leaving her quickly; he had made a good impression on her, he had softened the hard feeling which had come into her heart. She thought of him with pity. He looked so careworn, so pale, so haggard; his eyes were sunken, and lines of care marked his face. Besides, she could not help thinking of the old days, when they had met as lovers, and when her heart throbbed wildly at the sound of his footstep. As for Merlin, he was, on the whole, fairly satisfied. He thought he saw a way out of the difficulty, in relation to the money which Vivian Gregory had advanced in order to relieve Mr. Granville of his difficulty, and he made plans whereby he thought he should be able to manage affairs so that the truth need not be known.

Accordingly, the next day he went to Truro and saw Lawyer Tremain.

"I am really sorry to seem discourteous, Mr. Rosevear," said the lawyer, when Merlin had hinted at his business,



"but you see my position. It would never do for me to talk with strangers about confidential matters."

"I think you hardly understand the exact position of things," replied Merlin. "As it happens, I am not quite a stranger to the business; I have more interest in it than you imagine. The truth is, Mr. Vivian Gregory is an intimate friend of mine, and we were talking about the affair only two days ago."

"You know that Mr. Gregory—" the lawyer hesitated.

"I know that my friend Vivian Gregory has sent you a cheque for the amount Mr. Newlyn advanced on the Creekavose estate. I know, too, that the cheque has been presented, and that through you Mr. Newlyn's money has been refunded. As yet no steps have been taken by Mr. Granville towards paying Mr. Gregory."

"But steps will be taken Mr. Rosevear. I am expecting ——well the affair will be settled in a few days."

"Just so," replied Merlin. "My purpose in calling was to ask you to still keep Mr. Gregory's name in the background. He does not wish it to be known, he expressed this strongly when I saw him in London two days ago. You see he feels sensitive. The truth is I have had more to do with the affair than appears. My friend Gregory is not a rich man, and the advancement of such a large sum embarrassed him somewhat, so much so that—that—I—well anyhow, he wishes that his name shall not be mentioned to Mr. Granville. Indeed his desire is that nothing shall be said about the business more than is absolutely necessary. When Mr. Granville comes to settle the affair, he will naturally wish to know to whom he is indebted, and will probably make guesses concerning the name of his benefactor. Well, Gregory's wish is, ay, and mine too, that you shall reveal absolutely nothing. Mr. Granville, or rather Miss Granville, will make her cheque payable to you,

and you will deal with Gregory direct. Our wish is that n name shall be mentioned. That can be managed, I tak it?"

"Oh, certainly. It is rather unusual though."

"That does not seem to me to affect the case."

Lawyer Tremain looked at Merlin keenly. He was nc a fighting lawyer, and his wits had not been sharpened b connection with intricate cases. His was an old-fashione practice, consisting mostly of conveyancing and othe matters of the most unromantic nature. Still he was a lawyer, and he said, drily, "You see, Mr. Rosevear, thi business has been done in Mr. Gregory's name. I am quite aware that you seem conversant with the matter, and I have no doubt as to the veracity of your statements; still, as I am sure Mr. Granville wishes to communicate direct with his benefactor, I must write to Mr. Gregory so that he may confirm your statements."

"As it happens," replied Merlin, "I received a letter from Gregory this morning. He was at the time of writing just starting for Paris *en route* for Egypt, where we are spending a holiday together. The first page refers to this business. Will you kindly read it?"

Mr. Tremain took the note, and read the first page.

"My Dear Rosevear,—Yes, I'm ready for the Egypt holiday. I've felt so unwell lately that I consulted a doctor this morning, and he urges me to go with you. There's nothing serious the matter with me, but he forbids my staying in England, or doing any work for a few weeks. I find after all that the money business is all right, so there need be no rearrangement of the Creekavose affair. Besides, as you may imagine, I feel sensitive about the matter, and do not wish my name to leak out in any shape or form."

"That settles the matter," remarked the lawyer. "It would have been more in order had he written me again

acquainting me of this desire. Our arrangement was that no names were to be mentioned for the time, and that he would write me again concerning it. Still Mr. Gregory does not seem to care much about business. He is on the way to Egypt now you say?"

"Yes, he will be in Paris now. I shall meet him either at Brindisi or Naples, I don't know which yet. He will send me a telegram in a few days."

A few minutes later Merlin was in the streets of Truro.

"I've managed very well," he said. "I don't know that there would have been much danger, but there's no knowing. Anyhow the old fellow will keep silent now, and Granville will soon be under the impression that I helped him out of his difficulty. It will rile him, of course, but it will be all right after a little while. I'm a free man now; I wonder now—I wonder now——" and then Merlin entered into a world of speculations.

Three weeks later Merlin Rosevear and Vivian Gregory had taken up their abode at Shepheard's Hotel, Cairo. For the first three weeks of their residence in Egypt the young men gave themselves up to sight-seeing. They visited the mosques, they climbed the Great Pyramid, they surveyed the Sphinx, they sailed up the Nile, and galloped their donkeys over the Lybian Desert; after this Gregory expressed a desire for work.

"The life here arouses all the romance of my nature," he said; "I seem to live in a new world. Last night while I stood under the acacia trees in the moonlight, and watched the waters of the Nile, I seemed to be removed far from the nineteenth century. Everything is laden with mystery and magic. All sorts of wild fancies come to me. I'm going to work as well as play."

"Nonsense," replied Merlin; "what is the use of trying to work? We are here for health and a holiday. For my

own part the life here is prosaic enough. All one wants to do is to sit in the sun and smoke these delicious Egyptian cigarettes."

"But I feel I must work, old man. I feel as strong as a horse. My month of rest in the sunshine has made me a new man. All my lassitude is gone. Till the weather becomes too hot, I shall write four hours a day, I can't help it. A story has come to me which demands to be told; I think I can make a good thing of it."

"But surely there is no need, old chap. You were saying yesterday that your money affairs have turned up trumps. Why work then?"

"Because I can't help it. Have you no desire in that way?"

"Hang it, no. Nothing is worth while to me. I lack motive-power, and I lack interest in life. Besides I can't feel the romance that you talk so much about."

"Then go up to the citadel and read the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"What's the use of that? But I say, Gregory, if you work, I suppose I must lie alone and smoke."

"No. I shall work in the early mornings."

"The devil must be in it all, I think," said Merlin, when he was left alone. "Why is it that Gregory is inspired to work while I feel that nothing is worth while? Never mind, if I can get Helen back, my old eagerness will come to me. But at present I feel I could write nothing, save some cynical stuff which Helen would shudder at. I wonder if I shall ever win her again? If I can, then the world will seem young and worth while."

And so it came about that while Gregory worked Merlin slept, or grumbled at the life of Cairo generally. During the hours that the two men were together Merlin sought to destroy all Gregory's hopes of winning Helen, and pondered deeply over his future actions.

It was May when they returned to England. Both

were bronzed, and appeared to be hale and strong. Merlin had become restless, however. Gregory had wanted to visit Switzerland on their way home, but Merlin did not fall in with his friend's wishes. "I'm longing for a sight of England," he said. "After all, there is no beauty like the beauty of our Mother Country."

So Gregory came with him, and in the middle of May they arrived in London. Gregory went to his rooms in Chelsea, bent on finishing the novel he had commenced in Egypt, while Merlin was eager to find out what had taken place since his absence.

"Yes, I must keep friendly with Gregory," he said, as he sat alone on the evening of his arrival in London. "I am glad I took him with me. I've kept him out of harm's way, and I know that he's done nothing to advance his fortunes with Helen. And yet the beggar seems happy. Why is it, I wonder? I suppose it is because he finds a joy in work. I wish I could fasten on something good. But I can't; beyond a few trivial things I can do nothing. Everything fails to grip me. I daresay I could write a smart, clever story; but I can put no *soul* into anything. Well, it can't be helped now; besides, I am longing to see some chaps, I want to know what's going on. I think I'll go to The Boomerang."

He had no sooner entered the club smoking-room than he was met by half-a-dozen outstretched hands, while words of welcome were uttered on every hand. After all, he was still somebody, and the loss of power which he had experienced lately was only temporary. It was simply that Helen had for the time upset him.

There was general chatting for a few minutes, then he asked for news. Had anything happened?

"Well, depends what you mean, Rosevear," replied MacFarlane, who was in the club, and who, it will be re-

membered, met with Merlin in Paternoster Row wh latter was starving. "There's been no General Elec that's what you mean."

"Oh, hang elections! Let's talk shop. I haven't about Grub Street for so long that I am anxious to the news. I have religiously avoided all literary while away, and as a consequence I know nothing. anything good been published this spring?"

"Haven't you heard of anything?"

"No, nothing."

"Then you don't know that three weeks ago 'A brought out her second book, and that it has run into thousand in that time?"

"No, I had not heard; is it so?"

"It is, by Jove! It's better than 'Morning,' stronger and more matured, but it has all the tende of her first story."

"And it's selling rapidly?"

"Like wildfire."

"What is the name of the book?"

"Why, surely you are not going to read it! You l at the earlier one, I remember—once called it a S school prize book."

"Yes, but I've learnt wisdom. What is the name thing?"

"'Heather Bloom.'"

"I remember," said Merlin, as if he were speak himself, "I remember it last summer. Has she at her own name to it?"

"No; she still uses 'Arcadia.' It's a beautiful You are in the country as you read it. By jove, it as much good as a week at the sea-side."

"You are very enthusiastic," said Merlin; "an might think you were in love with 'Arcadia.'"

"I don't know who isn't," replied MacFarlane. "Half the fellows who were at Mrs. Tredinnick's last night were simply wild in their praises of her."

"What, is she in London?"

"She's been here for a fortnight, and the best of it is, she isn't spoiled by her success. She's just a simple country girl in spite of all the praise that has been lavished upon her. That's where she's different from nearly all the other successful women writers. Why, think of Jennifer Bray, she made a hit with her 'Wings of the Wind,' and nobody was good enough for her to notice. Miss Granville, on the other hand, never seems to realise that she has Literary London at her feet."

"And what do the critics say concerning this 'Heather Bloom'?"

"Just what they said of 'Morning.' Of course some sneer at her as a writer of the 'John Halifax' order, but the best critics have nothing but good to say of her."

"I don't think she likes you, though, Rosevear." It was Pascoe who spoke. Pascoe had "got on" since Merlin had met him some months previously, and was looked upon as "a man of promise."

"Why?" asked Merlin, sharply.

"Possibly because she regards you as a rival," replied Pascoe.

"Yes, but what reason have you for thinking she doesn't like me?"

"Well, the truth is, I was at Mrs. Tredinnick's last night and had a few minutes' chat with her."

"Oh, Mrs. Tredinnick invited you—did she?"

"Well. I mentioned your name," replied Pascoe. "I asked her if she knew you?"

"Well."

"Oh, nothing; only I thought she looked anything but pleasant. Of course, it may be it was only my fancy."

Merlin turned the conversation into other channels, vexed with himself for talking on such a subject when so many listening ears were around. Still he could not drive Pascoe's words from his mind, and during the time he remained at the club he was far from being a pleasant companion.

He still kept the house in which he and his wife had lived. Somehow, while its associations were far from pleasant, he could not make up his mind to get rid of it. Besides it was convenient for his work, and the money which came to him through the death of his wife, added to the royalties he received on his books, enabled him to keep a large and expensive home. His old study was scarcely altered, and when he sat there after his visit to his club it felt as though his wife were close by his side. Still, all feeling of remorse had gone. He had no pangs of conscience, he was not made uncomfortable by the thought of his last interview with his wife. To all appearance, he was a happy man, save for the restless look in his eyes.

"I must see her to-morrow," he said to himself as he went to his bedroom, "I think sufficient time has elapsed now. I feel assured that she will receive me; if she refused people would talk, and she would not like that. I'll not give her up without a struggle. No, if it's in the power of man to win her, it shall be done."

The next afternoon he drove to Russell Square, and was received by Mrs. Tredinnick, but Helen Granville was not in the room.

"You look better for your holiday in the East, Mr. Rosevear," said the old lady, "let us hope that your mind has been made healthy as well as your body."

"Why, have you regarded my mind as unhealthy, Mrs. Tredinnick?"

"You know I have. Let us have no more 'Failures' o

David's Son.' You can do good work, let us have it in your next book. What are you doing now?"

"Simply nothing, Mrs. Tredinnick."

"Nothing?"

"Just nothing—that is worth mentioning."

"Well, better nothing than that which is bad."

"Just so. How is Miss Granville?"

"Oh, fairly well; but tired. She has been *fêted* so much that she is positively weary of it all. She has been lying down, I think. She will be here presently."

"Her last book has been a great success, I suppose?"

"Very great—oh, here she comes."

For a few minutes they talked of trivial matters, and then Mrs. Tredinnick was called away, leaving Merlin and Helen alone.

"I could not help coming, Miss Granville," said Merlin, when she was gone. "Perhaps my presence is unwelcome, but something drew me here as soon as I knew you were in London."

"Have you been long in England?"

"I arrived yesterday."

"I thought," said Helen, after an awkward silence, "that —that we said 'Good-bye' in Cornwall, Mr. Rosevear."

"But not for ever, Miss Granville; surely you do not mean that?"

"Yes," she said, quietly.

"But why? Surely we must meet in the future?"

"Perhaps so; but as mere acquaintances, between whom there is no intimacy. I saw you come this afternoon. At first I decided not to see you, but I thought it better to come down and tell you this."

"But what have I done to offend?"

"There is, I think, no need to talk of that. Let the past be buried as far as that is concerned."

She was painfully nervous. Evidently it cost her a great effort to say this, her hands trembled as she played with the paper-knife she had taken from the table near.

"Then," said Merlin, "I am to understand that for the future we are strangers?"

"If you please."

"But I think it fair that you should tell me why?" cried Merlin. "We parted as friends; why this change? I know I acted wrongly, and yet is it a sin to love wildly, passionately, unreasonably? But you said you forgave me. Since then I have been in Egypt. I have done nothing to deserve this treatment. Besides, I can't be treated as a stranger. It must not be! Do you hear? It must not be! You know that I love you still—ay, more than ever! And now you tell me we must be as strangers."

His words came in gasps—hoarsely. She saw he was deeply moved. She realised now that he was desperate.

"I did not mean to say this—now," he continued, "but you have forced me. Yes, I'll be honest. I had not given up hopes of winning you again. I thought if you saw me occasionally, and realised the depths of my love, you would forgive the past—and—and come to me again. Yes, I have planned for this—schemed it for many a long hour. Oh, Helen! Surely you know that I have never ceased to love you—never, even when I was blind, imbecile, mad! And you, no you cannot have ceased to love me! Surely the vows you made down by the sea were not made for a day! Oh, don't discard me, don't! For the love of God don't drive me to utter despair!"

He saw she was moved by his words, and he waited eagerly for her reply.

"Do you think it kind to speak like this?" she asked, presently.

"Kind!" he cried, "what do you care about kindness?

You drive me to utter darkness, and then accuse me of unkindness. But be merciful. You love me still, in spite of everything, tell me so."

"And if I did," she said in a hard voice, "I could not tell you so."

"And why?"

"Because I have discovered that there is a great gulf between us; that your world is not mine; that we no longer breathe the same atmosphere or live the same life. If I loved you as I once did, it would make no difference. I've seen what you desired. I received the letter you sent me while you were in Egypt, and I saw then that this time was coming. We can never be anything but strangers, I have consented to this interview only to tell you this."

"But you must tell me why! Yes, you must tell me why?"

"Because—because," she hesitated for a second, and then went on, "because you are not a good man; because I dare not listen to your words!"

The last sentence came from her like a cry of pain, but they made Merlin's eyes flash with a strange light.

"But," he cried, "you must not——"

"Will you go?" she cried.

"Not until——"

"Then I must," she interrupted, and left the room.

"She loves me still," cried Merlin, when a few minutes later he entered the cab that took him rapidly towards his home. "She loves me still, in spite of everything. Let me be careful and I shall win her yet."

"There's a woman waiting for you, sir," said a servant as he entered the house. "She said she would not go until she had seen you."

"A woman," thought Merlin, "who can it be?"

CHAPTER XXXV

MRS. BLINDY'S NOVEL

"MRS. BLINDY!" cried Merlin, as he entered his study.

"Yes, Mr. Rosevear. I see by the pipers to-dy that you was 'ome from Egypt, so I though I'd call."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure."

"Not at all. Ah, Mr. Rosevear, things ev chynged since I wur 'ere laust. We talked then about my comin' to a christenin'; I did'n think then thet yor pore missis was so near 'er hend. I thought as 'ow you might 'a' sent me a funeral cawd, seein' as 'ow we wos old friends, but I s'pose as 'ow you wos hupset a goodish bit."

"I left London directly after the funeral, Mrs. Blindy."

"So you did. Well I did expect a memoriam cawd, and I wur disappointed when one did'n come; but I hi'nt agoin' to bring up *thet* agin ya. I 'ope as 'ow you enjyed yerself in Egypt, Mr. Rosevear."

"Pretty well, Mrs. Blindy," replied Merlin, wondering what she wanted.

"Well, Mr. Rosevear, death will come," said Mrs. Blindy; "I hi'nt a Salvation Awmy woman, bein' brought up a lidy, although I 'ave been brought down in the world since 'Arry took to slummin' for the Awmy. But I em religious enough to sy thet. Death will come, as I said to 'Arry when I see the noos in the pipers. 'Arry would ev



come and consoled ya if you adn't agone abroad, an' although I ses it as shudden, ther' i'nt many as can come up to 'Arry in sich things."

"No?" said Merlin.

"No, ther' i'nt. I've took to goin' to church litely on account of it bein' more respectable, but this I must sy, the pawson at the church i'nt a got nothin' like the gift that 'Arry hes."

"He always struck me as a man of considerable ability."

'Thet's wot everybody says, and thet's wy I don't think as 'ow the General treats 'im fair. Put 'em side by side, Mr. Rosevear, at a public meetin', sy at the Congress 'All, and he'd beat the General at real pawful speakin'."

"Nothing more likely. And how has your husband got on with his book, Mrs. Blindy?"

"Well, now, thet wos one thing as I called to see you about. I've been very much disappointed, Mr. Rosevear, and wen I sees in the pipers as 'ow you wos 'ome, I mide up my mind as 'ow I would come and see ya."

"And how have you been disappointed, Mrs. Blindy?"

"Well, 'Arry ev given up all thots of becomin' a litery man, Mr. Rosevear."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it's awd on me, seein' as 'ow I 'oped by thet means to get back to my true plice in life, and 'Arry and I kime to words about it. But you knows 'Arry, Mr. Rosevear. 'Mitey,' ses 'ee, 'let's ev no awd nocks; but I'm agoin' to keep to my Awmy work; this 'ere writin' is only a temptition of the devil,' ses 'ee, so I see it wos no use. But I i'nt agoin' to give up 'ope, Mr. Rosevear."

"No? That's right. But what plans have you now?"

"Well, as you know, Mr. Rosevear, I went to a boardin'

school at one time, and was brought up as a lidy, and so me and my Sally ev been talkin', and so we've decided to tike up a litery life."

"Yes, a good idea."

"I've read a tremenjus deal of books since you left, Mr. Rosevear. I fairly delight in Mrs. Henry Wood and Miss Braddon, and so, as you may say, I've got some pawful plots in my mind."

"I should think so; well?"

"Well, I've mide up a plot, and my Sally have been a writin'."

"Yes."

"And I think, Mr. Rosevear, as 'ow together we've got somethin' as'll mike a sensytion."

"And have you finished it?"

"Yes; I've brought it with me."

"My word, you've been quick about it, Mrs. Blindy; it's only a few months ago since you were here about the captain's great work."

"Yes, we've worked awd. My Sal have passed the sixth standard at the Board school, Mr. Rosevear. It grieved me, bein' brought up a lidy, to be obliged to send 'er to sich a common plice; but this I will sy, the learnin' at a Board school is first-clawss, and Sally ken write very fawst; thet's 'ow we've finished it so soon."

"I see. Well, what do you wish me to do with it, Mrs. Blindy?"

"Well, if you'll read it, Mr. Rosevear, and criticise it freely—for we i'nt afraid of criticism, Mr. Rosevear—we thought as 'ow you might recommend it to some publisher or editor."

"I see."

"I know as 'ow you are busy, but seein' as 'ow we are old friends, and that I took you in afore you mide a nime

for yourself, I thought as 'ow, you bein' so well known, could 'elp us a goodish bit."

"Very well; I'll do what I can."

He said this because he wanted to be alone to think, and he fancied that this would be the easiest way to get rid of his importunate, one-time landlady. His mind had been constantly reverting to his interview with Helen during the time Mrs. Blindy had been speaking, and he was eager to recall the conversation they had had together. Mrs. Blindy, however, was not to be got rid of so easily.

"There's jist another thing, Mr. Rosevear. I i'nt got no acquyntances among editors and litery people meself, but you 'ev, Mr. Rosevear, 'ev'nt you?"

"Oh, yes, a good many."

"Well, then, you'll know what tikes with 'em?"

"I think so."

"Thet's my pint. I'm no Redical meself, Mr. Rosevear, my 'Arry is; but I allays ses as 'ow the Conservative pawty is most respectable, and I means to stick to 'em. I don't know if ever I've mentioned it to you, Mr. Rosevear, but I come of a very respectable family, and was brought up as a lidy. Well, this 'ere novel deals with the upper clawsses and is very awd on Mr. Gledstone, and that kind of common people. Thet bein' so, I should like you to tike it to a editor of a rawther 'igh-clawss Conservative piper, or magazine, and I've no dawt but that if you was to tell him as 'ow I was brought up as a lidy, it would have its proper effect."

"I'll bear it in mind, Mrs. Blindy," replied Merlin, gravely.

"Now, there's jist another pint, and I've done, Mr. Rosevear. When this 'ere novel comes aat as a book, which would you advise, the three vollums, or the one vollum?"

"As it is your first book, Mrs. Blindy, I think it mi be well to leave that to the publisher."

"Thet's what Sally says; but I believe in doin' th things in a business-like wy. I've been readin' the lit pipers, Mr. Rosevear, and find as 'ow publishers 'ev b robbin' us hauthors, and I don't want to be robbed knows my dooty to myself as well as to other people."

"Just so, Mrs. Blindy; but, in a matter of this s what would be best for the publisher would be best for yo

"And 'ow much do you think I ought to tike for serial rights, Mr. Rosevear?"

"It will be impossible for me to tell until I've look into it, Mrs. Blindy. When I wrote first I was glad to g my work in order to get it printed."

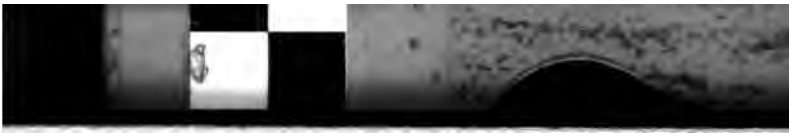
"Yes; but as you may sy, my kise and yours is differe You was a-brought up in the country, and your fautha a motha was pore people, so to speak. I've been brought in London as a lidy, and though I ses it as shouldn't, th i'nt many es 'ev 'ed the experiences as I hev."

"Just so. Well, you'll want to be going now, M Blindy, and I must not detain you."

"Oh, I i'nt no sich hurry as all *thet*, and it's quite pleasure to talk with a litery man, seein' as 'ow I interested in the world of letters meself. Still, I dessay 'ow you are fairly busy."

When she had reached the door, however, Merlin four that Mrs. Blindy had still another "aspec' of the subjec' bring forrad."

"I 'ear as 'ow leadin' novels are sent to Gledstone for be reviewed, Mr. Rosevear. Now, es this book is awd people like him, I don't think it'll be best. I knows n duty as a lidy, and I don't want to hurt his feelin's, althou I don't think nothink of his politics, he tikes too mu notice of the lower clawsses to suit me."



"I don't think you need trouble about Mr. Gladstone, Mrs. Blindy. Good evening."

"And 'ow long do you think it'll tike ya, Mr. Rosevear, to read that 'ere M S S"—Mrs. Blindy enunciated the three letters very distinctly—"and let me know what you think on it?"

"Oh, very soon, Mrs. Blindy, as soon as ever I can," and Merlin held the door as if waiting for her to leave.

"There is another thing for you to consider, Mr. Rosevear, and it's this 'ere. I i'nt a quite settled about whether we shell bring this out under an assoomed nime. Sally's for puttin' our nimes in full, but I ses as 'ow it'll look better if ther's a mystery abawt the hawthors. So I ses to Sally, we'll call it 'The Dook's Revenge, a Novel of 'Igh Clawss Life, by a Motha and Dawta,' or by 'Two Lidies.'"

"I think your suggestion is admirable, Mrs. Blindy, but the matter can be discussed in detail with your publishers when the story appears."

"There, she's gone at last," said Merlin, a few minutes later. "I was a fool for talking with her at all. Still, she's good fun, or she would be if my mind weren't so full of other things. Let me see now, let me consider exactly how matters stand."

He walked around his study, thinking carefully. He recalled Helen's every word and look, he tried to understand what they meant.

"I had no intention of going so far this afternoon," he thought. "Everything came so sudden, so unexpected. But I think I can see the meaning of it all. Yes, I can see. She's been thinking of me while I've been away, and—and she loves me still, there can be no doubt about that. But Mrs. Tredinnick has been poisoning her mind against me; she thinks I am a bad fellow, and she's made

Helen believe it. Of course, it was an easy task. That 'Failure of David's Son' would lead anybody to think that its author was altogether regardless of what Helen holds most dear. I see. She loves me, but she's afraid of me. She's afraid to accept me as a husband, and she dare not meet me in the future, because if she did she could not refuse my pleadings."

He laughed joyfully as he continued to promenade the room.

"I've been told again and again that I fascinate women," he said, with a smile of complacency, as he stood before a mirror. "Yes; I'm not a bad-looking fellow. I don't look haggard and pale like I did before I left England. I see, I see. Helen, I can read you like a book. You love me still, and I'm going to conquer you. Yes, you shall be my wife before six months go over my head. But how can I manage it?"

His face became grave again, and a look of doubt came into his eyes.

"She's the sort of girl of which martyrs are made," he thought; "she would rather die than do what she believes to be wrong; and so, although she feels that there is a gulf between us, I must make her feel that it is her duty to marry me; and I will, too. She'll not see me at Russell Square, I'm pretty sure of that; and if we meet elsewhere it will only be as strangers. If I could only get her here—if I could make it necessary for her to consult me about something—if she could be led to come here and consult me as a friend in need, then I'd remove every barrier. But what can I do?"

He became very excited, and his hands trembled so that he could scarcely light the cigar which he had placed in his mouth.

"I *will* get her!" he cried. "She's everything to me,



My very life depends on her for this world and the world to come—if there is one. But what can I do?"

He asked this question again and again as he paced to and fro the room, but no answer came. A dozen plans passed through his mind, but he discarded them all—they did not seem feasible.

"What I do must be done quickly," he cried, after discarding several plans; "there's no knowing what stories she may hear here in London, and I know Helen, I know that—that—but what's the use, something must be done—what? It should be a simple thing, let me get her here, let her hear my story again, and she'll say yes, as surely as she said it down in Cornwall. Oh my God, how I love her!"

For more than an hour he revolved scheme after scheme in his mind, but excited as he was, he could not think of anything that would fulfil his purpose.

Presently his eyes rested on the parcel which Mrs. Blindy had brought. He pulled off the brown-paper wrapper, and saw, written in a schoolgirl's handwriting, the title of his former landlady's novel,

"THE DUKE'S REVENGE."

"What a fool the woman is!" he said, impatiently; "still every servant girl thinks she must write a novel nowadays. Of course it's nothing but rubbish."

He sat down and looked at the story, the plot of which Mrs. Blindy assured him she had conceived, while Sally had done the writing.

He read the first page. After all it was not written so very badly. Evidently, Sally had profited by the education she had received at the Board school. The spelling was correct, and the grammar, while shaky, was not outrageously

bad. He read the first chapter and saw Mrs. Blindy's idea. She had read the *Royal Novelettes*, the *Family Trumpet* and other literature of a similar order, and these had suggested her plot. Dukes, earls and baronets were very plentiful. The scheming villain appeared on the first page, the immaculate heroine whose birth was mysterious was introduced on the second, while on the third an irate old duke and his only son conversed most naturally on the position of "the gentry." Before the end of the chapter, the potential young duke had fallen in love with the immaculate heroine, while the scheming villain, with "classical beard and eyes that glittered like a demon's," had discovered the secret of the aforesaid immaculate heroine's birth. The said villain, moreover, having ascertained the fact that she was "the heiress of millions of bright sovereigns and the possessor of an ancient name besides several massive castles," had shaken his fist at the potential duke, and had exclaimed with great gusto, "By the gods this angelic creature shall be mine, and woe be to the man who presumes to cross my path!"

In the second chapter the plotting commenced. There could be little doubt that Mrs. Blindy had read her *Family Trumpet* with much profit, for all the old tricks were most religiously introduced; but before he reached the end of the second chapter he had thrown aside the manuscript and had started to his feet, as though a new idea had come to him.

"It seems all right," he cried; "I know it's like the last act in an Adelphi drama, but why not after all—why not?"

He thought over the plan for two or three minutes, then he burst out bitterly, "I've come to a fine condition of things now. My course of action is suggested by my landlady's novel, which was suggested by the *Family Trumpet* or something of that sort. But why should I care? Helen refuses to see me again, and I am scheming to get her to

meet me. Of course it's like a schoolgirl's novel; but I will see her again somehow, and why not?"

He rang the bell and then commenced writing rapidly.

"George," he said, when a servant appeared, "I want you to take this note to the Boomerang Club and ask for Mr. Belcher."

"Yessir."

"If he's there give it to him."

"Yessir."

"If not you must go to his rooms in Craven Street, Strand."

"Yessir."

"If he's not there ask the woman who keeps his rooms to tell you where he is. If she knows, find him; if not, leave the note there. You'd better take a cab at the nearest stand. Do you understand?"

"Yessir."

"That'll do then. Make haste, for I want him here at once."

The man left the room, and again Merlin pondered over his scheme. He was ashamed of it, and yet his desire to obtain Helen's promise to be his wife urged him to make use of it. At one time he would have scorned to have entertained such a thought for a second—that was when he was poor and obscure. Now he—but what was the use of troubling? The thing was simple enough; it could hurt no one, and it would bring his desires to pass.

He turned towards his writing-table, and Mrs. Blindy's novel caught his eye again. This was what he read:—

"Rupert De Vere laughed a low, fiendish laugh.

"'I will win her!' he cried. 'If I have to walk over the dead bodies of twenty ancestral dukes, she shall be mine!'"

Rupert De Vere was the name of Mrs. Blindy's villain.

"It seems to me that I am a kind of Rupert De Vere,"

he laughed. "I am acting just as stage villains act in three-penny shows up and down the country. And yet why not? Belcher will do it right enough. Anyhow, I'll see what he says."

Half an hour later Mr. Belcher had been admitted into the study, and the two were talking eagerly.

"You know 'Arcadia'?" asked Merlin.

"No. I don't. I'm not one of the popular editors who get invited to meet these big people. Of course I've heard of her—who hasn't, for that matter?"

"She used to be a sweetheart of mine."

"Is that so? Whew!"

Merlin hated himself as he spoke; all that was good in him revolted at what he was doing. But he was much excited, and scarcely realised the meaning of his action.

"I want you to do something for me, Belcher. You are still on the *Boomerang* through me, and you gave me your promise that you would serve me if occasion occurred."

"Yes, you know I will gladly; but what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to write a paragraph for the next issue of the *Boomerang*—nothing libellous, you know, but one of those paragraphs stating that 'Arcadia' was once engaged to me, but that the engagement was broken off years ago at my desire. Make it very ambiguous, and give what reasons for our parting that you think best. You know the kind of paragraph; say nothing, but make it so that anybody can think a great deal."

"I see; well, what then?"

"Write the paragraph first. Write it now."

"All right."

Belcher sat down and wrote rapidly, and in a few minutes handed a slip of paper to Merlin.

"Will that do?" he asked.

Merlin read what the editor of the *Bobmcrang* had written very carefully, read it again and again.

"Yes," he replied presently, "I think it will."

As Merlin had suggested, the paragraph said nothing positive. There was not a shadow of libellous matter in any line of it. It looked perfectly innocent and harmless, and yet Merlin knew it would, to Helen Granville's sensitive nature, be painful in the extreme. No one could say it suggested anything of a serious character, and yet it was of a nature to set people talking; it said a great deal because it said absolutely nothing at all. It might, in some respects, have been written by a kind friend, and no one could find a single word in which there was a sting; but Helen would feel the sting.

"I'm glad you think it will do," said Belcher. "Well, what do you wish done next?"

Merlin read it again.

"Yes," he repeated, slowly; "I think it will do."

He lit another cigar, and smoked silently for several minutes, looking steadily into the fire, which he had caused to be lit, for the evening had turned cold. Belcher likewise smoked, but he did not say anything; he knew that Merlin would not thank him for disturbing his thoughts.

"Now, Belcher," he said, at length, "supposing the proof of this were sent to the lady in question, the *proof*, mark you, accompanied by an editor's pencil-note to the effect that it would appear in a literary paper on such a date, what steps do you think she would take?"

Belcher meditated for a second.

"The name of the said literary paper not to be mentioned?" he asked.

"Certainly not."

"Might I ask if you are at present on friendly terms with 'Arcadia'?"

"Ye—es; yes, certainly."

"I should say she would come and see you right away."

"Very well. I want you to get this set up at once in the type of your usual 'Gossip' column, and then send her a copy at once."

"Yes. What then?"

"Two posts later I want you to send the same paragraph to me, with the same remarks on the margin."

"Very well. And if no notice is taken, do you wish it to appear in the *Boomerang?*"

"No; at least, not till you hear from me further."

"All right. Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all—for the time."

"Then I'll be going. Good-night."

"Good-night."

After he was gone Merlin sat thinking for a long time. He never felt so mean, so degraded before; he was condescending to a trick to bring his desire to pass, to a trick which an honourable man ought not to use. Should he not send to Belcher and tell him to proceed no further? Yet, why should he? It could do no harm; it was very simple, and the result would be that Helen would come and see him. Yes, that would be her course of action—he knew her well enough for that; besides, all was fair in love, and everything was plain. Helen loved him still, but she was afraid to be with him, afraid of his influence; she knew that if she were alone with him he would gain his old ascendancy over her. She was religious; she regarded many of the old conventions as sacred, while he had cast them to the winds; and hence, while she loved him still, her conscience forbade her coming into contact with him. And he was only using a simple means to draw her to his side, so that he might plead his case and make her happy; for he would make her happy —yes, and she should never regret her coming back to him.



With Helen by his side he could be a good man, a true man, he would do good work; and in the days to come she would be thankful for what he had done.

He did not doubt the success of his scheme. In his excitement he did not imagine that Helen might use other means than those which had suggested themselves to him. He was sure that he knew her thoroughly, and was certain what she would do; besides, Belcher, who was a keen-witted fellow, had corroborated his own thoughts.

And so when he went to bed, while he was excited and wakeful, he was confident as to the course of events.

In due time he received the proof of the paragraph which Belcher had written. If possible it seemed more innocent in print than when in writing. Indeed, it seemed too innocent. It might have served his purpose better had it been more pronounced and if one or two poisonous innuendoes had been inserted. Still it was, perhaps, better as it stood. He remembered Helen's sensitive nature. He knew how the slightest approach to scandal would wound her sorely; yes, it would suffice.

He calculated how long it would take before Helen would come and see him, and then he dreaded lest Mrs. Tredinnick should come with her. It would never do to have a third person at the interview! That fear soon departed, however. Helen would never show it to Mrs. Tredinnick; such an act would be alien to her nature. No; she would come alone.

But the hours passed, and still she did not arrive. She would receive the paragraph two posts before it came to him, and he had fancied that she would come immediately on its receipt. At length he became very anxious. A whole day passed away, and he heard nothing from her. Had she taken a different course from that which he had anticipated? had she consulted some one else, or had he been mistaken in her? had she decided to take no notice of it?

The following morning he eagerly scanned his letters in the hope of seeing Helen's handwriting, but she had not written. What should he do? He thought over the whole affair again; he examined it point by point. Since Helen had not come to him, was it not his duty to go to her? He would have a good excuse for doing so. He could appear grieved, indignant; he could tell her what he intended doing. Of course there was the danger lest Mrs. Tredinnick might be at this meeting, but it might be averted; yes, he could boldly ask for a private interview. On the whole, he was glad she had not come; it would seem better for him to go to her – it would inspire her with confidence. He looked at his watch. Yes, it was after ten o'clock. He went to the hall and put on his hat; he had scarcely done so than he heard a ring at the front door. He hurried back to his study, his pulse beating wildly.

"A lady to see you, sir."

He looked at the card which the servant had brought.

"Helen Granville" was the name inscribed thereon.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE SUCCESS OF MERLIN'S PLANS

MERLIN ROSEVEAR turned eagerly towards the door. After all, his desires were to be realised, his plan was successful; then a look of intense annoyance crossed his face, for by Helen Granville's side stood Vivian Gregory. What did it mean?

To explain this it is necessary to revert again to the events of the previous day.

Helen Granville was alone when the paragraph, about which Merlin had pondered so much, reached her. Her correspondence had become large, and she did not open this communication until she had read the rest of the pile of letters which came by that post. When she read it first she scarcely understood what it meant. It was not a cutting from a paper, but "proof"; the wide margin told her that. At the bottom of the paper, however, she saw the word "over." On turning to the other side, she saw inscribed in blue pencil marks these words: "The note on the other side will appear on Saturday, 18th, in a literary paper. —Ed."

That was all. What could be the purpose of such a communication? Her cheek crimsoned as she read the paragraph for the second time. Merlin was right. It wounded her sensitive nature keenly, she shrank from having her name associated with any man's in such a way.

It is true the words looked simple enough, but they could be misinterpreted, they could be made to mean a hundred things.

Who wrote them? What was the purpose of writing them? Why should the "proof" be sent to her? What was the name of the "literary paper" in which the lines were to appear? These and many other questions she asked herself as she sat in the library alone. Presently she became calmer, and began to think of a course of action.

Her first impulse was to go to Merlin and ask him if he could give any explanation. Perhaps he, with his wide circle of acquaintances among literary people, could help her. Besides his name was mentioned as well as her own; in fact, the whole paragraph hinged on their relations when he was an unknown miner; but this impulse soon died out. Certain revelations had been made to her while Merlin had been in Egypt, revelations which had influenced her behaviour towards him. No; she could not go to Merlin—anyhow, she could not go alone. Then she thought of consulting her aunt, but this idea was quickly dismissed; Mrs. Tredinnick was not quite the one to whom she could speak. What should she do then? Let the paragraph appear without taking notice of it? The thought was unbearable. Sensitive to the least approach of such gossip, she could not bear that her name should be bandied around in clubs and restaurants in such a connection. But what steps could she take? It is true she had made many acquaintances, but there was not one with whom she could talk, about such a delicate matter. Then her heart gave a bound. Yes, there was one; it is true he had asked her to be his wife, and she had refused, but she trusted him still; besides, since Merlin had visited her, prior to his going to Egypt, she had made certain discoveries which had surprised her.



A few minutes later she found her way to a telegraph office and wired to Vivian Gregory:

"Will you come to Russell Square immediately? Urgent.

"HELEN GRANVILLE."

Then she went back and read the paragraph over again, still wondering who could have written it, and why it should have been printed and sent to her in such a way.

Vivian Gregory was not in when the telegram arrived at Ventnor Street, but when he returned, two hours after its arrival, it lay on his study desk.

His first thought on reading it was one of joy. "Thank God she needs me," he cried; but it was quickly followed by one of anxiety. "I hope nothing is the matter, at least I hope it isn't serious," he said as he hailed a cab.

Still his heart throbbed with a strange joy as the cab rushed along Piccadilly. "Something's wrong, and she's turned to me for help," he cried, "and yet I thought she seemed cold and reserved when I saw her."

He read the telegram again. "Urgent," he repeated. "Surely she's not ill; surely there's no danger in that direction."

The cab seemed to crawl along, and when they came to the Circus and there was a hindrance to their progress in the shape of a number of conveyances, he asked the cabby if he thought he was engaged by the hour.

"Steady does it, guv'nor," said the cabby, "I caunt drive over twelve 'buses and abaat fifty 'ansoms. This i'nt a bloomin' balloon, and I i'nt a got a licence fur flyin'!"

"A snail would get on as fast," was Gregory's retort.

"Well, if yer like ter go daan to Covent Gawden Mawket yer might pick up one," replied the cabby, "and

if yer think 'em s'perior in speed to this yer nag, well—I'm puffickly willin'. I caunt sy no fairer nor thet."

There was a laugh among the 'bus-drivers who heard the cabby's retort, and then, the policeman giving notice that they might pass on, the cab was drawn rapidly up Shaftesbury Avenue.

Gregory had worked himself into a fever by the time they reached Russell Square. He did not forget to give the cabman double the usual fare, however, which caused that gentleman to be considerably mollified, and to remark that he "kime as fast as 'ee could, and it wern't a pyin' gime to ev a raaw with the coppers."

When Gregory entered the house he found Helen anxiously waiting for him.

"I came as soon as I could, Miss Granville," he said, eagerly; but I was out when your telegram arrived. There's nothing wrong, I hope."

"I hope not," replied Helen. "Will you read this?" and she handed him the paragraph which had troubled her so.

Gregory read it carefully, but rapidly.

"Forgive me if I use bad language, Miss Granville," he cried; "but if I can get hold of the fellow who wrote this I'll twist his dirty neck for him."

"Can you suggest what it means?" asked Helen. "Why should the proof be sent to me with that pencil note? Besides, what purpose could any one have in writing such a thing?"

"Have you any enemies that you know of, Miss Granville?"

"No."

"But you'll have them for all that. A successful writer is always envied by a host of poor quill-drivers. Let me think now."

He stalked across the room two or three times, then he burst out suddenly: "Were you aware that any one in London knew of your—your—that is, that you were at one time engaged to Merlin Rosevear?"

"No."

"How could it have leaked out then?"

"I do not know. You knew it—that is all."

"You know I have never mentioned it," he said, with a solemn, low voice; "I could not—you know why. Merlin must have told it himself."

Helen was silent.

"And yet," he continued, "there's no knowing. Some newspaper fellow may have been down to St. Endor, and have picked up bits of gossip. You see, you are very much talked about, and people are always eager to know details about the lives of well-known people."

Still Helen refrained from speaking.

Gregory examined the paragraph again. "A Literary Paper," he mused. "Let me look at the envelope," he continued, after a pause.

Helen gave it to him.

"A Fleet Street post-mark," he said, as he pointed to the stamp. "Of course, if we wait until Saturday we shall know, but I must find out before that. This thing must not appear."

"I hope not, I sincerely hope not," replied Helen.

Again Gregory examined the mysterious communication.

"Miss Granville," he cried, at length, "have you any literary papers in the house?"

"Yes, a number."

"Let me see them, will you?"

"Here they are on the desk."

Gregory looked at them one by one. "*Athenæum*, *Literary World*, *Academy*, *National Observer*—no, not

one of them would put in a thing like that. Let me think now, what are the literary papers which insert personal items? By Jove, I believe I've got it; I believe I remember the type. Have you got a copy of the *Boomerang*, Miss Granville?"

"I don't think so. There may be an old number here somewhere, but I'm not sure."

"Try and find it if there is, if not I will go out and get one."

A few minutes later a copy of the paper was forthcoming. Gregory opened it eagerly, and turned to the column headed "Gossip." Then he took the paragraph sent to Helen and compared it with the items in the paper. "The type is the same," he cried, "and the hand that wrote that 'Gossip,' wrote the thing sent to you. I am sure of it."

"The *Boomerang*," said Helen, "I know nothing about the *Boomerang*. It is a paper I have scarcely ever seen."

"I know it, though," cried Gregory. "I have learnt something of its history, and of the men at the back of it. I wonder now—I wonder—no, no, he could not do that."

"What do you mean, Mr. Gregory?"

"Miss Granville," said Gregory, "I do not wish to pry into your affairs, neither do I ask you to betray any confidences; but I think I begin to see a light. I am not sure, but perhaps you can help me, that is if you can trust me."

"Yes, I can trust you implicitly."

"Thank you. Have you had any communications with Merlin Rosevear during the last few months? That is, I know I am taking a great liberty, but has he ever asked you to—to forgive the past, and be to him what you once were?"

"Yes."

"Lately?"



"Less than a week ago."

"And you?"

"I told him I could not see him again."

"That you could not see him again?"

"Except as a stranger. I have discovered that—well, certain revelations have been made to me which makes it impossible for me to be friendly with him."

"You could not tell me about this, perhaps?" said Gregory, with a husky voice.

"No, not altogether. Yet I don't know why I should keep it from you. He came to me just before I left London, you remember, some months ago. He spoke to me in a way that I found hard to forgive; I was obliged to tell him to leave the house. Then, before he went to Egypt with you, he came to me in Cornwall, pleading forgiveness. It was immediately after the death of his wife, and he seemed so penitent and looked so ill that I said I would try and let the past be forgotten. While you were in Egypt he wrote me."

"Wrote you?"

"Yes. I did not answer his letter. I discovered that he had deceived me in such a way that I could not possibly act in a friendly manner towards him. Immediately after his return from Egypt, just a few days ago, he called here. At first I thought I would not see him, but I decided that I had better tell him that henceforth we must be strangers."

"And you did this?"

"Yes."

"And how did he take it?"

"I can scarcely tell you."

"Pardon me for asking; it is painful to me as well as you, and I would not refer to it, only I am trying to find out the meaning of that paragraph; but did he act as a would-be lover? Did he ask you to marry him?"

"Yes; that is, he asked me to give him hope."

"And when you told him that you must be strangers?"

"I think he misunderstood my meaning."

"Misunderstood your meaning?"

"Yes; I have thought since that he imagines I—I still care for him. Pardon me, I can tell you no more."

Gregory was perplexed. He thought he saw Merlin's hand in the paragraph, but he could not understand why he should cause it to be sent.

"Miss Granville," he said at length, "I will find out the author of this before the night is over. Will you be at home to-night?"

"No, I have an engagement."

"Then I will call again to-morrow morning. Will nine o'clock be too early?"

"No, I shall be eager to see you then."

"It is Belcher's handiwork," said Vivian when he got into the street. "I know his way of doing these things, and although few are aware of it, I know that Belcher has become the tool of Rosevear. But what could be Rosevear's motive?"

He pondered over this matter deeply as he went towards the city. Then he made up his mind to see Belcher.

He drove first to the *Boomerang* office, but no one in authority was there. He asked whether Mr. Belcher would be back that evening. The clerk thought so, but was not sure. Vivian drove to half-a-dozen spots where he thought it likely the editor of the *Boomerang* might be found, but in vain; then, late in the evening, he went to his rooms in Craven Street and found him in.

No sooner did Vivian enter the room than he saw that that gentleman was intoxicated.

"Ah, Mr. Gregory, proud to see you!" he said, in a thick tone of voice.

Gregory pulled the paragraph from his pocket, and laid it before the editor of the *Boomerang*.

"What did you mean by writing that, Mr. Belcher?" he asked, sternly.

"How do you know I wrote it?"

"I do know, that is enough."

"Has he told you?" asked Belcher, with a giggle.

"And what if he has?" responded Gregory. "Mr. Rosevear and I are old friends."

Mr. Belcher's brains were muddled with drink or he would have been more cautious. As it was, he fell into the trap Gregory had set for him.

"If he's told you all about it, what need is there to come to me? You and Mr. Rosevear are old friends, and you'll know the girl was his—(hic)—sweetheart. He's a deep one, he is, he wanted her to come and see him, I saw that, but what for I—(hic)—don't know. Perhaps he's told you."

"But, mind, the paragraph must not appear on Saturday."

"Won't it? Look, Mr. Gregory, neither you nor I—(hic)—are the proprietors of the *Boomerang*, but I'm the editor, and—(hic)—allow no dictation."

Gregory left soon after. He discovered but little more after this stage in their conversation, for Mr. Belcher became possessed of a kind of drunken dignity and reserve.

The following morning Vivian found his way to Russell Square. He had thought the matter out through the night, and had decided upon a plan of action. He could not see matters clearly, but he had a general idea of the motives which had prompted the man he had called his friend.

"Miss Granville, will you go and see Merlin Rosevear this morning?" he said, after they had exchanged greetings.

"At his house? Alone?"

"At his house, yes; but not alone, if you will allow me to accompany you."

"I could not go alone; but I will go with you, if—if it is necessary."

"It is necessary. At least, I think so. Let me tell you my experiences of last night." Accordingly, he related his interview with Belcher, and his own thoughts concerning it.

"Yes," cried Helen, excitedly, when he had concluded, "let us go, let us go at once."

The visit to Merlin was almost as painful to Gregory as to Helen. For years he had been friendly with him, and since the death of Merlin's wife he had grown to be almost affectionate towards him. He had troubled much about many of the things he had done, but he had never believed that Merlin would do that which was dishonourable. During the time they had spent in Egypt, Gregory had told him of his hopes and longings, and from the way Rosevear had spoken and had apparently sympathised with him, he was led to believe that in spite of everything he had a friend upon whom he could rely.

Even now he hoped that some explanation might be given which would dispel the grave fears which had gathered in his mind.

Helen was very silent on their way to Merlin's house. She seemed to be nerving herself for a painful scene. Sensitive as she was, she suffered greatly to feel that she was involved in the scheme of a man whom she could not help thinking had become dishonourable.

Merlin, as was stated at the commencement of the chapter, was greatly chagrined at seeing Gregory. He did not want a third person at their interview, he would destroy his plans.

"I was just coming to see you, Miss Granville," he said, "I can guess why you have come. Gregory, old chap, would you mind stepping into the next room, I should like to see Miss Granville alone for a few minutes."

"Presently, Rosevear," replied Gregory. "I wish to know first why you caused this thing to be written and sent to Miss Granville." He took the paragraph from his pocket-book as he spoke.

For a moment Merlin was nonplussed. He was not prepared to be met in this way. He soon recovered his presence of mind, however.

"I was coming to see Miss Granville about it this morning," he said. "I, too, have received a copy. There it is, a *facsimile* of yours. Can you explain it, Miss Granville? In spite of *my friend's* accusation, I am perfectly ignorant concerning it."

"Rosevear," cried Gregory, "I could not have believed this of you. You know it is a lie. I have found out that you caused Belcher to write it. You know that the *Boomerang* is practically your paper, and that Belcher is your tool."

"The *Boomerang?* What has that paper to do with it?"

"I say, Rosevear, don't. You know that it is in the same type as the 'Gossip' of that paper: you know, too, that you got Belcher to write it."

"How dare you say so!"

"Why, I saw Belcher last night. I accused him of it, and he could not deny it."

"Mr. Gregory," cried Merlin, "if you were not a pattern young man I should think you must be drunk. As it is, I imagine you must be mad. Or, perhaps," he continued, with a sneer, "you are using this as a means to win Miss Granville's affections. There, I'll forgive you. I know your weakness, and I can explain this to Miss Granville."

"Mr. Rosevear," cried Helen, "did you or did you not cause that paragraph to be written?"

He tried to utter an emphatic denial, but as he looked into Helen's eyes he could not.

"Miss Granville," he stammered, "the circumstance can be easily explained."

"Explain it then."

"I could if we were alone. It is not a matter for a third party."

"I have perfect confidence in Mr. Gregory. There is nothing you need keep back."

"But I cannot explain before him."

"Then," cried Helen, "I must conclude that you had a dishonourable motive in writing it, or in causing it to be written. It is a base action, worthy of no honourable man. It was, I suppose, written because I told you at our last meeting that for the future we must be strangers. A worthy revenge for a gentleman."

"As God is my witness, I never intended that it should be published!" he cried, losing control over himself.

"Why, then, should it be written? Why is this thing sent to me, telling me I was once engaged to Merlin Rosevear, with hints to the effect that the news of his marriage nearly killed me, besides suggestions that I need not repeat? You do not deny that you caused it to be written, even although you may not have written it yourself. How can I believe it was not intended for publication? Why was it sent to me at all?"

The ground seemed digged away under his feet; his plans had failed. Besides, Helen seemed to think worse of him than he really deserved. He became desperate, his caution departed, he lost control over himself.

"I will tell you," he cried, "and if you are sorry afterwards that Gregory heard my words, do not blame me. When I saw you last I knew that you loved me still. Ah! you cannot deny it! You know you love me! Well, I love you; you know that, too. But you with your Puritanic notions became frightened of me; you said you dared not talk with me because I was a bad man. Your mind had

been poisoned against me by Mrs. Tredinnick and others. Still, you knew that you would yield to my pleadings if we met. Well, I determined we should meet, and I took this means of drawing you to my side, or for forming an excuse whereby I could see you again. I have miscalculated my chances, and I have failed. There, you have the truth now —the whole truth!"

"And you—you took such means as this!"

"Yes; I would take any means. Can't you see, Helen, it was all for love of you? Don't let my plans fail; have some pity on me!"

She saw that he spoke the truth—saw that this man, usually so keen and cautious, had been led to take resource to a trick in order to fulfil his desires.

"And you thought that the reason I said we must be strangers, was that I loved you and yet feared you?"

"Yes; why, you as good as said so."

"Listen, Merlin Rosevear," she said. "I feel ashamed to be obliged to make an explanation about such a matter, but I must. The reason why I told you that for the future we must meet as strangers was because I had lost all respect for you, because I could no longer regard you as a gentleman."

"Will you kindly explain?"

"Since you force me to it, I will. You led me to understand that you had advanced the money on the Creekavose Estate, and thus freed my father. You asked me to take no steps towards repaying you, knowing all the time that you had absolutely nothing whatever to do with it."

"What!" cried Gregory, "did he tell you that?"

"I have since discovered who our friend was, and it was impossible for me to meet you as one meets one's equals, when for months you had been acting a deliberate lie. You claim that I still love you. Let me tell you this: if a vestige of

the feeling which I once possessed remained, it passed away at the time I first saw you after those long years. I felt then that we lived in different worlds, and the feeling has grown stronger since. But for the trouble I fancied you were in, remembering your brutal confession to me, I should never have spoken to you after that day on which your wife died. Even now I feel contaminated by the thought that you, while your wife was alive, should make a confession of love to me and ask me to wait for you until her death. Now I will go," and she walked towards the door.

"And mind, Rosevear, if that scurvy paragraph, or any other, appears, you will have me to reckon with—mind that," cried Gregory as he left the house.

"What a blithering idiot I have been!" said Merlin, after they had gone. "I feel like a whipped spaniel; I shall not dare to hold up my head again. Oh, what a fool I've been! I've lost the only woman I ever cared for, or ever can care for, because—because I wanted to get on. Ay, and I've been found out in my plotting just like a stupid school-boy. I've gained the world, but—but I've lost my soul!"

For hours he fumed and bemoaned his fate; for hours he plotted and tried to think of other means whereby he could gain what he had lost.

"I'll give it up," he said at length. "I'm beaten; I won't become like an Adelphi villain. One thing, the world will never know about it. Neither Gregory nor she will ever speak about it; they are not of that sort."

As for Gregory, he went back to Russell Square like one in a dream. Everything had turned out differently from what he had expected.

"I'm sure Mrs. Tredinnick will be pleased if you will come to lunch, Mr. Gregory," said Helen, as they stood at the entrance of the house.

"Thank you, not to-day; I want to think," said Gregory. "I say, Miss Granville, I never meant you to know—that is —about that mortgage affair."

"I found it out just after you had started for Egypt," she said, with a blush; "but—but this time it was I who told the solicitor to keep silence."

"I wonder, I wonder," said Gregory with a bright light in his eyes, "I wonder if there is any hope for me after all? It seems too good to be true. How happy I should be if it were so!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

REWARDS

MERLIN ROSEVEAR sat in his study with a bundle of press cuttings before him. A year had passed away since his interview with Helen, and the new novel he had written had appeared about three weeks before. He had been looking at the reviews which had been forwarded, and they had not pleased him. It is true that some of them spoke highly of his work, they said that in spite of the new writers which had appeared he still maintained his position, and that while parsons and prudes might denounce his writings as impure, men and women who had seen life as it was, would declare that he told the truth. Most of the notices, however, were far from favourable; they admitted the cleverness of the book under review, they confessed to intellectual freshness manifested in several of the situations, but they complained that there was a want of life, a want of real power. Moreover, it was mostly agreed that the work had a saddening effect, it was utterly depressing because there was no hope breathed into its pages, while an utter lack of faith in human nature was confessed from beginning to end.

"We miss the tender grace of Mr. Rosevear's earlier books, especially his first," concluded one review. "Time was when we looked on him as a writer whose name would have a lasting place on the roll of fame; but unless his

work greatly changes, we do not think this can ever come to pass. The novel before us strikes us as the work of one who has had a past rather than a future."

Merlin flung it aside angrily.

"They all call me clever," he cried, "but they all say I lack the breath of life. And it is true. I don't *feel!* I am inspired by no motives. I have no message to deliver, no truth to proclaim. I can't break new ground. Well, it doesn't matter, I don't lack for bread and cheese, I need do nothing, I have enough and to spare. And yet I know this, if I cease to write I shall be forgotten. Shall I though? 'Lovelight' still continues to sell, and people talk of me as the author of that, rather than as the writer of 'The Failure of David's Son.'"

He paced the room pondering over many things.

"I'm a successful man—a successful man," he continued; "this thing has gone into 20,000 copies already, but that kind of sale will not keep up if I don't produce better work. The public soon tires. Well, why not give up and retire on my laurels? And yet, why should I? I am a young fellow with my life before me. Still, that power, that *intuition* which Gregory used to talk about is gone. I don't feel now as though I *must* write. What is that old Luther said when he stood before his judges? 'Here stand I, *I can do no other.*' I never feel like that, and yet I once did—I once wrote because I couldn't help it—now—but there, it isn't worth while bothering; let things go."

He tried to dismiss his unpleasant thoughts, but he could not. They came crowding upon him. Memories of his old plans and hopes and feelings came to him. He remembered the time when he was a dreamer of dreams, a seer of visions, but now in spite of his youth, dreams and visions had gone.

He turned to the reviews again.

"What did that fellow say about 'Lovelight'?" he said. "Oh, I see, he mentioned the 'tender grace' of the book, and says it is lacking in my later ones. He's right, it *is* lacking, it is. But there, it's all humbug; tender grace, indeed, where can you find it in life? They say it's in Helen Granville's writings. Tender grace! It's goody goody twaddle! I am a realist if I'm anything; I write of things as they really are."

He pulled out a drawer of his desk to put away the press notices, but saw that it was full.

"There's a lot of rubbish here," he grumbled, "I may as well clear some of it away. Ah, what's this? Oh, I remember, it's that picture of Noel Paton's which some one sent to me."

He looked at it with an angry light in his eyes. He marked the drawn, haggard face of the man who was raking the sticks and straw—the face that was always turned towards the earth; he saw the eyes which forever looked down and which never saw the angel above with the crown of life in her hands. Then he read the words written beneath: "Merlin Rosevear. A faithful portrait."

Angrily he tore it into a score of pieces, and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"I'd like to know who sent it," he cried; "I would. Missed the crown of life, have I? Well, I've missed Helen! Ay, and I love her still! I'd give everything to get her; but I can't, I can't. I've thrown away my chances. Oh, I was a fool—a blind, maudlin fool! I used to have joy in life then. Now—well, these new books of mine give me no pleasure. I have no real love for them, like I had for 'Lovelight.' Yes; I've lost that, and I've lost Helen, and I've lost Gregory; but there, hang it! what's the use of whining? I'm not a schoolboy. Besides, she would be a constant reproach to me; she's a Puritan, and I'm a man of



the world. No; I'll not give up. I'll fight these confounded critics; I'll go straight ahead, and pay no attention to such balderdash as these reviews."

He lit a cigar and began to hum a popular song.

"I'm a fool for bothering. What's the use? No man is really happy, and everything takes away more than it gives. I'll just make the best of this dirty little world, and suck what sweetness I can out of life; as for these qualms of conscience about old ideals—but there! Yes, what do you want?"

"Mrs. Blindy, sir," said the servant who came to the door.

"Mrs. Blindy, oh, I can't be bothered; but, there, show her in."

"Well, Mrs. Blindy, and what can I do for you?" he asked, as that lady entered.

"Well, Mr. Rosevear, I thought I'd tike the liberty of callin' once more for old acquyntance sike."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure."

"I don't know about thet, but I kime abaat thet book which I left with you."

"Yes, well, I sent it back to you."

"You did. And I shaunt forgit the kind things you said abaat it. Well, Sally, es you suggested, have written it all over agine, an' we've sent it to several publishers, but they've all on 'em sent it back."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, the fect is, Mr. Rosevear, I don't believe as 'ow these publishers knows wot's good; if they did they'd give 'The Dook's Revenge' a chaunce."

"No doubt you are right, Mrs. Blindy."

"But you sawr the good things in it, Mr. Rosevear."

"Oh, certainly. There were some very remarkable things in it."

"Well, it's werry much improved now, and I kime to you on accaant of seein' this ere perrigrauf in the pipers."

"What paragraph?"

"Here it is, look. The editor says as 'ow you contemplite bein' your own publisher in the future."

"Well, such a thought has entered my mind, but I've by no means settled it."

"Now look 'ere, Mr. Roswear. I knowd you, and took you in when you wer'nt nobody, and I ses to Sally, 'I wur a friend to Mr. Roswear afore he mide a nime for hisself,' I ses, 'and naa as he thinks of stawtin as a publisher,' I ses, 'we'll just give 'im a chaunce of publishin' "The Dook's Revenge,"' What do you sy now, Mr. Roswear?"

"Impossible, Mrs. Blindy. If I publish it will only be my own books, and even that isn't settled yet. Indeed, I'm sorry such a paragraph has appeared. I only mentioned it in joke one day, and I suppose some newspaper man heard me."

"Then you caunt consider it, Mr. Roswear?"

"No, it's impossible."

"Then I shell give up all thots of a litery life. After all ther's not so much in it, and I 'ear as 'ow a lot of the lower awdas of the people are a tikin it up. For my own pawt, I think I shell go a slummin' with 'Arry. I 'ear as 'ow a lot of lidies among the tip-top gentry are tikin up slummin', and literytoor don't seem a pyin gime."

"You are quite right, Mrs. Blindy. Give up all thought of literature and go in for slumming. It'll pay better in the long run. Yes, what do you want?"

A servant entered the room again and handed Merlin a card.

"Mr. Crooker; oh, yes. You must excuse me, Mrs. Blindy, this gentleman will detain me for a long time. Give up all thoughts of literature, Mrs. Blindy, as you say



it's a low sort of calling. You take up slumming with the captain. Ah, Crooker, come in."

Merlin saw that the door was closed when he was left alone with his visitor.

"Well, Crooker, what have you new in the theatrical world?"

"I've taken the Venus Theatre."

"Whew! That's a bold stroke."

"Well, I want you to write me a play."

"What kind of a thing do you want?"

"Something that'll drive the people mad. I want it full of cynical, biting epigram, and something that's daring. I don't want Mrs. Grundy to be considered."

"Do you think that kind of thing will take just now?"

"I do. The present craze is for the romantic play. And there's a great deal of talk about the stage being purified. That means that by the time the Venus will be ready for opening there'll be nothing of this kind going. Besides, there's always a host of people who like human nature to be laughed at, and what parsons call sin excused—in a polite way, of course. Besides, I hate the craze which prevails just now."

"I daresay you are right. Well, what about terms?"

We bid good-bye to Merlin Rosevear here. I wish we could have left him a different man, a happier man. But it cannot be. I have told his story as truly as I have been able. He has gained what he has aimed for, but in doing so he has lost all that makes life worth the living. Verily he has his reward.

Meanwhile Vivian Gregory was preparing to go to Cornwall. For many months he had been hungering to go there. yet had not mustered sufficient courage to take the step. Not long after Helen's last interview with Merlin she had gone on the Continent with Mrs. Tredinnick, so that Vivian

had no chance of telling her what was still in his heart. On her return to England Helen had gone straight to Cornwall instead of remaining in London. Two or three letters had passed between them, and Vivian had eagerly read the friendly lines which Helen had sent him in the hope that he might find some word which would tell him that the great desire of his heart might be realised. He found none, however, and so he toiled on in London, and finished the book which he had begun in Egypt. As the months passed away the desire to see Helen again grew stronger; besides, since he had heard the words she had spoken to Merlin, his hopes, in spite of the lack of encouragement in Helen's letters, had grown stronger. And so when he had corrected the last proof-sheet of his book he prepared to start for Cornwall.

He left Paddington by the first train, and thus got to St. Endor before sunset. The little village was as quiet as ever, the same restfulness prevailed, but Vivian thought not of this to-day. His mind was full of conflicting thoughts, while hope and despair alternately possessed his heart.

As the homely Cornish woman brought in his simple meal that evening and told him in confidence that she'd "got a caaow naaow, and 'ad made a little pat of fresh butter a-purpose for him," his mind was away at Creekavose, and he wondered if Helen would receive him as he had hoped that she might.

He could not rest in the house, the air seemed close, and he breathed with difficulty, so he went out into the fields. Without thinking of the direction he was taking he turned towards Creekavose.

Should he go in? Why not? Helen regarded him as a friend, while Mr. Granville had cordially invited him there whenever he came to Cornwall again. Besides, he had paid Lawyer Tremain—but he would not think of that,



although he sometimes wondered why Helen did not refer to his action in the matter.

With fast-beating heart he rang at the door, and a servant appeared.

Was Mr. Granville at home?

No; he had gone to Truro, and would not return until after ten o'clock.

"And Miss Granville?" asked Gregory.

"She has gone out for a walk. I daresay she will be back soon. Will you not come in and wait, sir?" replied the servant who had recognised him.

"I think not. Which way has she gone?"

"Down towards the beach, sir."

And so Gregory turned his face seaward. The sun was setting in a clear sky, and the sea was lit up with a golden light until it looked like a vast sheet of fire. He entered the little wooded dell where the birds sang love songs to each other, and where innumerable flies sported in the light of the setting sun. In the near distance he could hear the waves splashing musically on the hard sea sand. He looked eagerly along the path, but he could not see Helen, and his heart became heavy.

"I might be a lad of two or three and twenty instead of being thirty-five," he said to himself. "If I don't see her to-day I shall to-morrow. Ah, there she is!"

She was standing on the spot on which he had first seen her, and he saw that she was watching the sunlight on the sea. Her back was toward him, and she did not know of his coming.

He came up close to her and then stopped as if afraid to go further. Strange as it might seem his happiness was, humanly speaking, at her disposal. One word from her and he would be lifted into heaven, one word from her and a great blackness would fall upon him—so great is the

power which God has given to woman. And Gregory knew this. For years his love had been burning, even when it seemed hopeless, a love which was pure and enduring. Let cynics laugh at the dreams of boyish lovers; for past his boyhood as he was, he felt that she was the goal of his heart's desires, and that her love would be to him the choicest gift of God.

Presently she turned and saw him. He held out his hands eagerly.

"This *is* a surprise!" she said, with a nervous laugh.

"Do I come in vain?" he asked.

"In vain?" she repeated.

"Forgive me for speaking so abruptly, I hardly knew what I was saying; but still you understand. Surely you know why I came?"

Had she not known, his pale, earnest face and the tremor in his voice would have told her, and as he spoke her mind swept back over the years. It was near here that Merlin had told her of his love, and she, unsuspecting the future, had promised her life to him. It was on this beach, too, that she had fought her battle after she had received his letter. It was here she had determined to live her new life. And then the memory of the time when Gregory had first told her of his love came to her. Since then she had received much praise, and many had sought her hand; but Gregory came to her when she was unknown and told her of his love; he had in the greatness of his heart rendered a service too. She did not love him then, she had not driven Merlin from her mind, in spite of everything there was an ideal Merlin that she could not separate from her life; but afterwards, when she had seen Merlin, when she saw that her idol had feet of clay, when she really saw how low his aims were, when she saw the man as he really was, she wondered how her heart had gone out

to him, wondered how she could ever have loved him. Even at that moment she knew she had loved the man as she hoped he was, and not the man who became sordid and base.

All this passed through her mind as she stood by Gregory's side, while he, with anxious eyes, looked into her face.

"I need not tell you how I love you, and have loved you for long years," he continued; "you know that, and you know, too, that I don't wish to pain you by pleading a love which you cannot return; but if you only could, if you only could!"

He spoke passionately, almost incoherently, and Helen, who had thought she could never love again, felt her heart beat with a new life. She could not tell why, but the thought of him and his great, strong love stirred her nature to its very depths, and she felt that the new life and the new love were his.

Then a feeling of shame came to her. Near here she had plighted her troth to Merlin; the memory of her words came back to her again.

"Will you not speak to me?" continued Gregory. "Can you give me no word of hope?"

"Will you let me refer to something before I answer," she said, "something that happened in the far past?"

"If you wish; but speak quickly, for I suffer."

His words smote her, and she did not make the explanation on her lips.

"Do you love me so?" she asked, with a glad sob.

"You know, surely you know."

She looked up into his face, and their eyes met. His were anxious, eager, searching; hers were filled with tears, but he saw the lovelight shining.

"Helen?"

"Yes, Vivian!"

* * * * *

"I wanted to tell you a little while ago that—that although years ago—I—I—that is—but I never loved as I love now, no, never! Believe that, Vivian!"

"I know, I know! May God make me worthy!"

The sunlight died away, and the stars appeared in the sky one by one. And still they walked by the waves and none but God and His angels saw them.

When they stood by Creekavose Gate that night no clouds hung in the sky.

"Shall I come in?" he asked.

"It's your house, Vivian; I shall never pay back the mortgage now!"

He gave a joyous laugh.

The moon shone upon her face; so brightly did it shine that he could discern every feature. He looked at her long and tenderly; their lips met.

"I didn't know it was possible to be so happy," he said; "I didn't know the heart could contain so much."

She did not speak, but he saw that the lovelight was still shining.

For they had kept their eyes upwards, and had received the crown of life!

THE END.

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